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# PERSONALITIES BEHIND THE PSALMS



# PERSONALITIES BEHIND THE PSALMS

SERMONS ON TWELVE PSALMS  
AND THEIR AUTHORS

*By*  
ROBERT B. WHYTE



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PERSONALITIES BEHIND THE PSALMS

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TO THE MEMORY OF  
My MOTHER  
WHO IN MY BOYHOOD TAUGHT ME  
TO APPRECIATE THE LITERARY BEAUTY OF THE PSALMS;  
TO SEE IN THEM A TRANSCRIPT OF THE PATHOS AND PER-  
PLEXITY, THE TRIUMPH AND TRAGEDY, THE HEROISM  
AND HAPPINESS OF HUMAN LIFE; AND TO FIND  
IN THEM THE LANGUAGE OF DEVOTION  
AND THE INSPIRATION OF FAITH.



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Psalm 22: A Psalm of David

## THE CROSS AND CONFIDENCE

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? . . . .  
They shall come, and shall declare his righteousness  
unto a people that shall be born, that he hath done this.

In order to understand the meaning of a poem one must read and interpret it as a whole. To quote an extract from it, to recite a few lines which are literally extracted from their context, may give a totally false impression of the poet's heart. For example, if you were to announce that Sir Walter Scott wrote some "Lines on Fortune" and were to repeat the first four of them:

Fortune, my Foe, why dost thou frown on me?  
And will my Fortune never better be?  
Wilt thou, I say, for ever breed my pain?  
And wilt thou ne'er return my joys again?

and were to stop there, your hearers would naturally conclude that Sir Walter was a chronic complainer and pessimist; which would be an absurdly unjust verdict upon him. In order to correct this erroneous

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judgment and to reach an accurate knowledge of the poet's attitude toward life it would be necessary to read the whole poem, which continues thus:

(No! let my ditty be henceforth—)

Fortune, my Friend, how well thou favourest me!

A kinder Fortune man did never see!

Thou propp'st my thigh, thou ridd'st my knee  
of pain,

I'll walk, I'll mount—I'll be a man again.

Similarly, one must not be misled by the opening sentence of this psalm—"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"—into supposing that the poet believes that God has deserted him. On the contrary, the writer of this psalm describes himself as emerging from suffering and pain into the serene conviction that God is so overruling the anguish he endures that "the tale of his sorrow will be a gospel for the world." The psalm, which begins in tragedy, ends in triumph. It proceeds magnificently from grief to glory. The wail of desolation of the opening verse is silenced and vanquished by the pæan of victory of the closing verses. Like the poem of Sir Walter Scott, the psalm is a transcript from life. It is the verdict which its creator pronounces upon his experience of life. The fury and ferocity of the human heart are portrayed with heartbreaking realism. In words that smite and burn, the psalmist

## THE CROSS AND CONFIDENCE

tells of sounding the profoundest depths of human anguish. And yet an unclouded faith shines through his bitter grief and gloom, dispelling and conquering it. The psalmist does not represent himself as leaving this world to the mournful strains of a "Dead March," but to the triumphant shout of a "Hallelujah Chorus." The fundamental note of the psalm is joy, not sorrow. It is not only a psalm of the cross, but of confidence. Its appropriate symbol is not a crucifix with the mutilated body of a dead martyr nailed upon it, but a cross, an empty cross, whose victim has survived and triumphed—the symbol of conquest.

The psalm is attributed to David, but some critics doubt its Davidic origin, contending that the suffering depicted in the psalm has no counterpart in the record of his life. Certainly its portrayal of suffering seems a gross exaggeration of any pain or dereliction experienced by him. But it must be conceded that no character in the Old Testament fits into the picture of anguish drawn in the psalm. Because of this some critics claim that the psalm is not the portrait of an individual, but of the nation. Israel is personalized, so they maintain, and represented as crying from the depths of its misery, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" This view of the psalm does not appear to me to be

justified. While the uniquely tragical though supremely glorious history of the Jewish people is undoubtedly reflected in this psalm, and while the tribulations recounted in these verses may sound like a very extravagant description of the sorrows David endured, yet these considerations are an insufficient basis for discarding the traditional ascription of the psalm to him. It should be remembered that David was a highly sensitive and poetic soul. One who is superbly endowed with imagination and sentiment feels more deeply than one of a phlegmatic and matter-of-fact temperament. He knows heights of joy unscaled by others and depths of anguish unplumbed by them. When his exquisitely sympathetic and emotional nature is accompanied by a magical gift of language, he will inevitably express himself in words and phrases that sound, to those who are strangers to his spirit, like flights of fancy unjustified by the experiences which inspired them. All through the Bible we find numerous illustrations of this characteristic of what Henry Mackenzie, the patriarch of Scottish letters, called "The Man of Feeling." When we read that "the hills and the mountains skip," or that "the waters flee," or that "the trees of the field shall clap their hands," we do not interpret these statements literally. When we read of Saul and Jonathan that "they were swifter than eagles,

they were stronger than lions," we do not suppose that these sentences mean that Saul and Jonathan literally moved faster than eagles or surpassed lions in sheer muscular force. When we read that "the stars in their courses fought against Sisera," we know quite well that its author simply meant to convey his conviction that the universe is built upon moral principles which cannot be successfully defied; that "there is a Power not ourselves that makes for righteousness." When we read that Jesus said to his disciples, "Say to this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and if thou shalt not doubt in thine heart, it will be done," we know that this was our poetic Lord's way of stating that the believing soul is not depressed into despair by seemingly immovable obstacles. Or, to take another example from David's writings, when we read that he said:

In my distress I called upon the Lord. . . .  
 He bowed the heavens and came down, . . . .  
 He stretched his hand out of the height,  
 Took me, and drew me out of many waters,<sup>1</sup>

we do not picture a physical arm reaching from the height of heaven to rescue David from being literally drowned in a literal flood of turbulent waters.

<sup>1</sup> Ps. 18:6, 9, 16; trans. of Samuel Cox, *The Expositor*, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1880, I, 11.

## PERSONALITIES BEHIND THE PSALMS

The poet not only expresses himself paradoxically and metaphorically, but he feels more deeply than other men. We know that the same physical stimulus does not produce the same degree of pain or pleasure in different persons. Likewise, similar emotional experiences yield dissimilar effects in different persons. Some men are thick-skinned, as we say. They are insensitive to slights and sorrows which are a torture to more delicately organized individuals. Remembering this, and recalling David's poetic and sympathetic nature, and reflecting upon his devastating experience of rejection and treachery and jealous hate, and his own high confidence in the ultimate glory of his kingdom, we do not find it impossible to believe that this psalm was written by him. David knew the cruel ingratitude and murderous hate of Saul, which made him a hunted and harried fugitive with a price upon his head. He experienced the bitterness of betrayal by his son, which drove him into exile. He endured the most vitriolic verbal derision of gloating enemies. He suffered all "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune," and there were times when heaven seemed indifferent to his harsh and apparently hopeless fate—all of which is reflected in this psalm in language natural and normal to a poet. But, although there were tragedies in his life, he did not conceive of

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life itself as a tragedy. He clung with passionate faith to the belief that he had been made king by divine ordination, and that God would use even his agony and shame for the eventual victory of his kingdom. This assurance is also reflected in the psalm, making it David's psalm of the cross and confidence.

Apart from its own intrinsic interest this psalm has a deep and abiding fascination because Jesus Christ quoted the first verse from it during his crucifixion. It was the fourth word from the cross. Even though Jesus had not quoted from it, devout people inevitably would have associated it with his crucifixion, so perfectly does it portray the experience and emotion of Jesus on Calvary. Every prophetic soul speaks larger things than he realizes. The words of every truly great and wise man have a significance beyond the circumstance of the moment. David's psalm of the cross and confidence found its fulfillment in the Christ of the cross. It describes with poignant clarity the physical anguish and verbal derision which Jesus endured there.

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? . . .

But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people.

## PERSONALITIES BEHIND THE PSALMS

All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying,

He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: Let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him. . . .

They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion.

I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels.

My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death.

For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet. . . .

They look and stare upon me.

They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.

Thus the psalm is a painfully perfect reproduction of the extreme agony and brutal taunts experienced by Jesus in his last earthly hours. The rest of the psalm, which relates the sufferer's unwavering faith in God and in his immortal influence upon the future, is consistent with the teaching and trust of Jesus throughout his ministry.

. . . . The meek shall eat and be satisfied: they shall praise the Lord that seek him: your heart shall live for ever.

All the ends of the world shall remember and turn



## THE CROSS AND CONFIDENCE

unto the Lord: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee.

For the kingdom is the Lord's: and he is the governor among the nations. . . .

A seed shall serve him; it shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation.

They shall come, and shall declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that he hath done this. These were the sentiments which, judging by the character and creed he always presented, were most congenial to the mind of Jesus in the dreadful hours of his crucifixion.

The quotation of the first verse of this psalm was the first self-centered cry of Jesus from the cross. Those which preceded it have direct and personal reference to other people. When the brutal soldiers cruelly wielded the hammer that drove the nails through his quivering flesh, he breathed a prayer of forgiveness for his murderers, saying, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Then, when his attention was attracted by the deep and tender penitence of one of the two thieves who were crucified with him, he spoke to him a gracious word of peace and hope: "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise." Later, when he looked upon the desolate agony of his widowed mother, he spoke to one of his friends, giving directions for the temporal welfare of her whose arms had cradled him: "Son, behold thy

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Mother; woman, behold thy son." Then followed three hours of silence, which was broken by the utterance of the words, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" In themselves the words are dark with tragic mystery. In themselves they describe an uttermost depth of desolation and desertion in the consciousness of Jesus. But when we remember that they are a quotation from the twenty-second psalm, we realize, as has been already pointed out, how unjust and unintelligent it is to isolate them and interpret them apart from their context. The fact that Jesus began to recite the twenty-second psalm justifies the conclusion that it formed the subject of his thoughts from the sixth to the ninth hour of the day of his crucifixion. We have seen how appropriate the psalm was to his experience of torture and rejection, and also how consistent with our Lord's habitual thought of God and his own redemptive mission.

If anyone wonders why Jesus did not recite the whole psalm, but only the beginning of it, or why he articulated so indistinctly that some of the spectators misinterpreted his utterance, the explanation is found in his physical condition. His strength was well-nigh exhausted. The lips which uttered this cry were stained with blood that flowed from the unstanched wounds made by the crown of thorns which cruel mockery had placed on his brow; the

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mouth which attempted to frame the words was parched with intensest thirst; the swollen tongue was cleaving to the roof of his mouth. A repetition of the psalm was physically impossible; but the fact that he began it is sufficient indication that it was the subject of his meditation in the period of silence, and that the spirit of triumph, not tragedy, possessed him. "And some of them that stood by, when they heard it, said, Behold, he calleth Elias." They thought that he was summoning Elijah, and the word used indicates that they believed that he was not supplicating, but commanding the great prophet. The impression received by those who heard him utter the words is totally discordant with the idea that Jesus felt himself destitute of the friendship of the Father, but altogether harmonious with the conclusion that his emotions were those of the author of the psalm from which he quoted, emotions of faith and victory.

Those who interpret the words as a cry of desolation and desertion are confronted with the problem that no one who heard them as they issued from the lips of Jesus so construed them. They did not impress the spectators as being words of despair and defeat. If the crowd at the foot of the cross had received the impression that Jesus felt himself forsaken by God, is it not probable that there would

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have been a repetition of the taunts and insults and derision that marked the early stages of the crucifixion? Would not the members of the Sanhedrin, who were present, have shouted, "He declared himself to be the Son of God, but now even he admits that God is not with him." Would we not have the record of a despairing groan from the penitent thief if he had concluded from this cry that Jesus, who had promised entrance with himself into Paradise that very day, now entertained serious doubt of entering the Paradise of God himself? There is not the slightest evidence that either his companions in crucifixion, or the members of the Sanhedrin, or his friends, or any of the spectators, imagined that Jesus regarded himself as forsaken of God.

Contrary to the spirit of the scene and of the psalm from which our Saviour quoted, subsequent generations have interpreted the fourth word from the cross as a shriek of despair. This may be accounted for by the fact that the spectators at Calvary who understood the words recognized the quotation, and were familiar with the psalm, and knew it to be a cry of confidence in spite of anguish and rejection. Later generations erroneously construed the words as a confession of forsakenness because they were unacquainted with the context. Here is a hypothetical case analogous to the history of the interpretation

## THE CROSS AND CONFIDENCE

of the fourth word from the cross. If today a prophet of God were being put to death by a vicious mob, and if, when his strength was almost spent and his vital energy departing, his lips should form the words, "John Brown's body lies a-mold'ring in the grave," and if he should find it impossible to continue speaking, everyone in the crowd would know that he intended to express his confidence in the ultimate victory of his cause, because everyone would be able to supply the next line, "His soul goes marching on. Glory, glory, halleluiah." But a generation reading the incident centuries later, unfamiliar with the song and ignorant of the language in which it originated, would most likely regard the words, "John Brown's body lies a-mold'ring in the grave," as an admission of tragic failure and bitter disillusionment.<sup>2</sup>

All that we know of Jesus, combined with the circumstances of the scene itself, makes it impossible to believe that by the utterance of these words Jesus intimated the destruction of his faith in God and in the ultimate triumph of his mission on earth. Never for a moment did Jesus doubt God. Never for a moment was his faith inferior to that of his noblest followers, who, in the darkest hour of their martyrdom, never lost the radiant sense of the Divine Pres-

<sup>2</sup> This illustration is adapted from the one suggested by W. B. Wright in *The Heart of the Master*.

## PERSONALITIES BEHIND THE PSALMS

ence. In every moment of his life and death he is our example, our ideal, our inspiration, and our Redeemer. Fighters for a cause, believers in an ideal, may seem to be overwhelmed in tragic and hopeless defeat; they may even be constrained to wonder whether God has not forsaken them; but let them not lose heart. Remembering Him who in the midst of agony indescribable was upheld by a very ecstasy of faith, who never dreamed that he was groping his way through darkness unfriended, but who believed that the Father's presence and the Father's power would overrule the mad passions of men and bring the righteous cause to triumph and the noble ideal to victorious realization, we may pursue our way through the thickest shadows, upheld by him who, in the darkest hour of Calvary,

Never doubted clouds would break,  
Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would  
triumph,  
Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,  
Sleep to wake.<sup>3</sup>

This was the comfort which "great David's greater Son" found in David's psalm of the cross and confidence.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Browning, "Epilogue."

Psalm 29: A Psalm of David

## SERENITY IN THE STORM

The voice of the Lord is upon the waters: the God of glory thundereth: the Lord is upon many waters.

The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty. . . .

The Lord will give strength unto his people; the Lord will bless his people with peace.

A sacred song entitled "King David's Lament" commences with a recitative consisting of the most melting father-wail on record in any language, "O Absalom, my son, would God I had died for thee." and continues with a portrayal of the king's pathetic yearning for the happy days of his lost youth when he tended his sheep and felt the presence of God amid the storm and the sunshine of his native hills and glens. The song contains a graphic description of peals of thunder and flashes of lightning and the roar of torrential streams rushing tumultuously down the mountain slope, followed by a picture of the peace and beauty of nature after the storm.

Give me the storm in all its power  
When lightnings flash and thunders roar;

## PERSONALITIES BEHIND THE PSALMS

The mountain torrent swells the dale  
And loud is heard each plaintive wail.  
A shepherd bold—I feared no harm,  
For Israel's God strong nerved my arm,  
The lion and the bear to slay,  
And every foeman drive away.

The storm is past and spent its power.  
The booming thunders roar no more,  
The vivid lightnings cease to flash,  
The mountain torrents, too, are hushed,  
The gorgeous sun, in splendor bright,  
Pours forth a flood of purest light.  
The feathered songsters fill the grove  
With all the harmony of love.

The twenty-ninth psalm gives validity to the singer's idea that David cherished thrilling memories of the wild majesty and almost terrifying grandeur of thunderstorms he had witnessed. Childhood recollections of such scenes were probably an important element in the inspiration of the psalm. Basically, it is not a nature poem, but a religious poem, because it was God's voice which its author heard and God's power he felt in the storm. The influence of the environment of their boyhood is indelibly manifest in the writings of great poets. Byron owed an incalculable debt to the scenery amid which his boyhood was spent in the Scottish Highlands.



## SERENITY IN THE STORM

Yet, Caledonia, beloved are thy mountains,  
'Round their white summits though elements war,  
Though cataracts foam 'stead of smooth-flowing foun-  
tains,  
I sigh for the valley of dark Loch na Garr. . . . .

"Shades of the dead! have I not heard your voices  
Rise on the night-rolling breath of the gale?"  
Surely the soul of the hero rejoices,  
And rides on the wind, o'er his own Highland vale.  
'Round Loch na garr while the stormy mist gathers,  
Winter presides in his cold icy car,  
Clouds there encircle the forms of my fathers,  
They dwell in the tempests of dark Loch na Garr.<sup>1</sup>

John Masefield, the present Laureate of England,  
in his poem, "Biography," proclaims his profound  
obligation to "golden instants and bright days" when  
some rich emotion bedewed and freshened his soul.

The day on which, beneath an arching sail,  
I saw the Cordilleras and gave hail; . . . .

The night alone near water when I heard  
All the sea's spirit spoken by a bird; . . . .

All of those gleams were golden; but life's hands  
Have given more constant gifts in changing lands,  
And when I count those gifts, I think them such  
As no man's bounty could have bettered much:  
The gift of country life, near hills and woods

<sup>1</sup> Lord Byron, "Loch na Garr."

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Where happy waters sing in solitudes,  
The gift of being near ships, of seeing each day  
A city of ships with great ships under weigh,  
The great street paved with water, filled with shipping,  
And all the world's flags flying and seagulls dipping.

Yet when I am dust my penman may not know  
Those water-trampling ships which made me glow,  
But think my wonder mad and fail to find  
Their glory, even dimly, from my mind,  
And yet they made me.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, the impressions received from the mountains and the streams and the operations of nature amid which he spent the sweet years of early life, coupled with the religious atmosphere of his father's home, molded David's immortal contributions to the literature of mankind. It seems likely that this "Psalm of the Thunderstorm" was inspired by an unforgettable day when, a shepherd lad, he saw a thunderstorm sweep in from the Mediterranean Sea to break in destructive fury upon the forests of Lebanon, momentarily illuminated by flashes of lightning, and resounding to the reverberations of the cannonade of the sky, until at length it died away in the southern desert, leaving a world warm and beautiful and placid in sunshine and peace. Years later this memory became the basis of this great psalm of adoration of the

<sup>2</sup> From *Collected Poems*. Used by permission of The Macmillan Co.

## SERENITY IN THE STORM

God behind the storm, in whom the faithful soul could trust, knowing that "The Lord will give strength unto his people; the Lord will bless his people with peace."

This magnificent description of violent, raging storm, of crashing thunder, torrential rains, turbulent waters, howling winds, uprooted trees, flaming lightning, and trembling earth, is justified by modern writers who have witnessed similar spectacles of storm in the region where David lived. In *The Tent and the Khan: A Journey to Sinai and Palestine*, R. W. Stewart gives a vivid sketch of one such unforgettable experience there:

The solemn stillness that pervades this wilderness, and the distance at which a man's voice may be heard have not failed to be remarked by everyone who has traversed it . . . . Some conception may therefore be formed of how majestic and awful a thunderstorm in such circumstances must be; but words are too feeble to describe the reality. Every bolt, as it burst with the roar of a cannon, seemed to awaken a series of distinct echoes on every side, and you heard them bandied from crack to crack as they rushed along the wadis; while they swept like a whirlwind among the higher mountains, becoming faint as some mighty peak intervened, and bursting with undiminished volume through some yawning cleft, till the very ground trembled with the concussion. Such sounds it is impossible to forget; it seemed as if the mountains of the whole peninsula were answering one

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another in a chorus of the deepest bass. Ever and anon a flash of lightning dispelled the pitchy darkness and lit up the tent as if it had been day; then, after the interval of a few seconds, came the peal of thunder, bursting like a shell to scatter its echoes to the four quarters of the heavens, and overpowering for a moment the loud howlings of the wind.<sup>8</sup>

The difference between this picturesque paragraph and the twenty-ninth psalm is that the former is simply a report of the impressions made by such a dramatic convulsion of the elements upon the physical senses, while the latter is the narration of a deeply religious soul for whom nature is the vesture and the voice of God. To David the roll of thunder echoing among the hills and shaking the earth, and the booming sound of mighty waters in flood were the audible syllables of the Lord Most High. "The voice of the Lord is upon the waters: the God of glory thundereth: the Lord is upon many waters. The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty. . . . The voice of the Lord shaketh the wilderness; the Lord shaketh the wilderness of Kadesh." The tempestuous wind which sent giants of the forest crashing to the ground was the breath of their Creator. "The voice of the Lord breaketh the cedars; yea, the Lord breaketh the cedars of Leba-

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Moses Bittenweiser, *The Psalms*, University of Chicago Press, 1938, p. 149.

## SERENITY IN THE STORM

non." The lightning that split the clouds and illumined the vault of heaven and intermittently revealed every portion of the landscape was the utterance of the Sovereign of the Universe. "The voice of the Lord divideth the flames of fire."

David's view of nature was identical with Carlyle's when he said: "What is nature? Art thou not the living garment of God? O Heaven, is it in very deed He, then, that ever speaks through thee? that lives and loves in thee, that lives and loves in me? The Universe is not dead and demoniacal, a charnel house with spectres, but godlike and my Father's," and finds its echo in Wordsworth's familiar lines:

. . . . And I have felt  
A presence that disturbs me with the joy  
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime,  
Of something far more deeply interfused,  
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
And the round ocean and the living air,  
And the blue sky, and in the heart of man.

Not only for David did the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament show his handiwork, but the shattering storm likewise was a witness to the glory of the Lord. Not only did he rejoice in the glory of the grass and the splendor of the flower, the sleep that is in the lonely hills and the silence that is in the starry sky, the multitudinous laughter of

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gently flowing streams, softly caressing their peaceful banks, but he found rapturous delight in the awesome majesty and grandeur of deluge and hurricane, thunder and lightning. Because of his vision of the eternal, transcendent and sovereign God, the uproar of the warring elements did not make him cry out in fear, but worship in faith. "The Lord sitteth upon the flood; yea, the Lord sitteth King for ever."

From such a faith there is only one possible conclusion: "The Lord will give strength unto his people; the Lord will bless his people with peace." The God whose omnipotence is manifested in his direction and mastery of nature, which man's puny strength is helpless to avert or control, is mindful of his children's welfare. He will still the fury of the storm and banish terror and dismay from human hearts, giving them strength and peace. David's trust in God was the secret of his serenity in the storm. Blessed is the man who holds, or, rather, is upheld by such a faith.

This psalm is not only a magnificent piece of descriptive writing. It is also a parable of the tempests of grief and loss and war that sweep and swirl around the very best of those who love the Lord—no less than the very worst of those who live as though there were no God—and the key to tranquillity and victory in them. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."

## SERENITY IN THE STORM

Storms of calamity are familiar experiences. To multitudes now living it must seem as if upon their day of life the night is falling, night without a star. Hurricanes of disaster have swept over whole nations. The gaunt and ghastly specter of famine, breathing the chill and clad in the pallor of death, is stalking through large areas of our world. Death and destruction from "the nations' airy navies grappling in the central blue" make life a hideous nightmare for the inhabitants of the cities of Europe and Asia and Africa. The human life of all the world is dislocated and disrupted by the cataclysm of war. Besides these large-scale catastrophes there are the ceaseless personal tragedies of illness and bereavement and misfortune.

There is no flock, however watched and tended,  
But one dead lamb is there!  
There is no fireside, howsoe'er defended,  
But has one vacant chair!

The air is full of farewells to the dying,  
And mournings for the dead;  
The heart of Rachel, for her children crying,  
Will not be comforted! <sup>4</sup>

To be able to say, in the midst of such misery and woe, "The Lord sitteth upon the flood; yea, the Lord sitteth King for ever. The Lord will give strength

<sup>4</sup> Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "Resignation."

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unto his people; the Lord will bless his people with peace," is to be safe and calm and glad. It is an achievement to be attained only by a profoundly religious man, by one who is unshakably convinced that the differences between right and wrong are not determined by transient caprice or selfish expediency, but by the sovereign will of God; that some revealing intercourse is possible between the human and the Divine; that life's solemn sanctions have an origin far above the ebb and flow of earthly circumstance. Such a faith is the only sure haven of those who are seeking solutions of the great problems which cannot be escaped by anyone who thinks at all. This is David's timeless message for our troubled age, and we cannot afford to disregard it today. Salvation from the evils which threaten to engulf our civilization can come only from beyond ourselves. Every human system has been discredited, and only by reliance upon and obedience to God can our world be redeemed from chaos to sanity. Let us, therefore, see in the stormful events of our day the overtures of God to our souls, and hear, even in the tramp of armies and the confused cries of tempest-tossed multitudes, the voice of God speaking to us. Let us catch the vision of the omnipotent and omniscient and all-loving One, high above the roaring flood of destructive forces, governing and guiding them, for in that



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vision is our strength and salvation. Let us lay to heart the lesson David learned.

True, the enormous advance of knowledge and the accompanying advantages of modern facilities have created conditions of life he never knew, yet it would be a most arrogant way of attempting to solve the perplexing riddles of existence to refuse suggestions from any competent quarter or to throw aside as worthless earlier records of human experience. Of course, we live in quite a different world from our forefathers, and are disinclined to let the dead hand of the past weigh too heavily upon us. But the past has a living hand also, and if we aspire to write a fresh chapter in the book of life worth perusal by our descendants, we cannot afford to ignore the well-thumbed pages preceding it. For truth has no date mark. Certain great changeless laws forever undergird the changing movements of mankind; and while, beyond doubt, age after age, we ought to grow into their fuller apprehension and their wiser embodiment, all talk about progress becomes a farce if we begin to think that the hour has now struck for growing out of them. Not all the corrosive acid of modern skepticism can discover any alloy in the pure gold of David's religious faith.

Through a mist of years I can still hear the voice of my old teacher, Robert Law, sounding in the

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classroom, addressing us thus: "Gentlemen, we seldom realize, and never adequately, what a stupendous thing it is just to believe in God, in a God who is really God, whose presence, thought, and power permeate all existence, whose eternal purpose disposes all events, overrules all wills, shapes all destinies. Such belief, if sincere and vital, must color life." <sup>5</sup> To possess, or be possessed by, such a faith makes one able to realize the truth of what the incomparable Winston Churchill said on the fateful day when the storm of war broke upon his nation: "Outside, the storms of war may blow and the lands may be lashed with the fury of its gales, but in our own hearts this Sunday morning there is peace."

Yes, "The Lord will give strength unto his people; the Lord will bless his people with peace."

The storm may roar without me,  
My heart may low be laid;  
But God is round about me,  
And can I be dismayed? <sup>6</sup>

David would have answered with a triumphant negative, a reply which is echoed by every trusting heart. After this manner also was the strong confidence of our Lord. His gracious promise, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you," was

<sup>5</sup> Robert Law, *The Emotions of Jesus*, p. 6.

<sup>6</sup> Anna L. Waring, "In Heavenly Love Abiding."

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proclaimed in the very shadow of the cross. Black clouds of doom were massing in the sky, lightnings of hate were already flickering ominously through them, and thunderbolts of wrath were about to be released against him and his followers when he calmly said, "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." "These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father." Thus he faced the storm in the power of his faith that "The Lord sitteth upon the flood; yea, the Lord sitteth King for ever."

We too must encounter storm; it is part of the inescapable heritage of our common humanity. But we too may know serenity in the storm. We too may know this psalm, both as example and experience, praying in full assurance of faith:

Other refuge have I none;  
Hangs my helpless soul on thee;  
Leave, ah! leave me not alone,  
Still support and comfort me.  
All my trust on thee is stayed,  
All my help from thee I bring;  
Cover my defenseless head  
With the shadow of thy wing.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Charles Wesley.

## Psalm 43: A Psalm of the Sons of Korah

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O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles.

Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy: yea, upon the harp will I praise thee, O God my God.

Although the psalm from which these words are taken has no heading indicating its source, yet its tone and sentiment and its repetition of whole sentences of the previous psalm force one to conclude that it is a continuation of it, and that it belongs to the group written by "the Sons of Korah," consisting of the forty-second to the forty-ninth inclusive. These sons of Korah belonged to the tribe of the Levites who lived on the eastern side of the river Jordan. They were intensely religious and, in David's time, were honored with the task and the title of "doorkeepers of the House of the Lord." They were richly endowed with the gift of music, and some of them, apparently, with the gift of poetry. Their passion for the religious services, which con-

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stituted the worship of God in the sanctuary, sings and sobs, thrills and throbs in the psalms bearing the ascription, "The Sons of Korah." When circumstances prevented their presence in the House of the Lord in Jerusalem, they lamented their deprivation in lines laden with grief and yearning. Sometimes the river Jordan proved an impassable barrier when swollen by heavy rains, or by melting snows, which sent tumultuous torrents from the mountains. Sometimes armies of invaders besieging their capital made it impossible for them to enter Jerusalem. Obviously it was some such situation which inspired this psalm.

Reading it, we feel that the author was a man of like passions with ourselves. He was visited with moods that were intimations of the unseen and the eternal. Brought up in a religious home, he had been regular and devout in the external observances of religion, especially in attendance upon the sanctuary. To him the presence of God was identified with the sanctuary; at least it was there that he found supremely the atmosphere of religion. Prevented by circumstances beyond his control from going to Mount Zion, he felt himself excluded from religious experience; he longed to join his worshiping companions in the House of the Lord, where he might enjoy, in a special sense, the consciousness of the divine fellowship, and he prayed:

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O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles.

Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy: yea, upon the harp will I praise thee, O God my God.

In these words may be found a religious technique, a method of recovering the mood of religion.

Let us give thought to these words of the psalmist in order that we may learn from this expert in the things of the spirit. In a measure his emotion was akin to that of Cowper, when he wrote:

Where is the blessedness I knew  
When first I saw the Lord?  
Where is the soul-refreshing view  
Of Jesus and his word?

What peaceful hours I once enjoyed!  
How sweet their memory still!  
But they have left an aching void  
The world can never fill.

This longing, in the experience of believers, is not confined to those who cannot go to church. It is often felt by those who bow in the place of prayer. It does not mean, necessarily, that the religion in which we believe has grown old and stale to us, but rather that we have lost the sensitiveness and freshness which

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once characterized our spiritual life. It is tragically possible to lose the sense of reality in religion. Let us seek the guidance of this psalmist who, confessing his inability to create within himself the religious mood, and troubled in soul, uttered the prayer which is our text, and which, like all true prayer, is both prophecy and plea, and although beginning with petition ends in possession.

This prayer is an illuminating flash of self-revelation. It is an informing and authentic bit of spiritual autobiography, and it is a mirror in which many, through the ages, have beheld a reflection of their own souls.

There is a moving and melting story of Thomas Huxley, the distinguished scientist who coined, or at least gave currency to, the word "agnostic." The designation—from the Greek verb meaning "I do not know"—was suggested by the story in the Acts of the Apostles which tells of the altar raised to the unknown god, and Huxley adopted it to express his own attitude on the subject of religion. But Huxley was not a stranger to that wistful yearning for religious experience which characterized the psalmist. On one occasion, while acting on a royal commission, Huxley and a colleague found themselves in a little country town. "I suppose you are going to church," said Huxley. "Yes," replied the other. "What if

instead you stayed at home and talked to me of religion?" "No," was the answer, "for I am not clever enough to refute your arguments." "What if you simply told me your own experience—what religion has done for you?" So the other absented himself from church and spent the time telling Huxley his experience of all that Christ had been to him. At the end of the hour Huxley, in a voice vibrant with emotion, said, "I would give my right hand if I could believe that." There are scores today who share Huxley's passionate desire for personal religious experience, that is, for personal experience of relationship with God. They read of what religion meant to their fathers. They know that to many of their friends God is not a mere name, a fetish, a superstition, but a Person with whom they have friendship of soul, as real as with the man whose hand they grip and into whose face they look. But to them this experience has never come.

There are others who know that they once had it, but have lost it. In the prayer which is our text, the psalmist was not seeking a novel experience, but the repetition of one which had often been his. Craving it again, he prayed that God would grant him the boon of the religious temper. His prayer blazed the trail for all seekers after reality in religion and forecast the experience of everyone that should follow it.



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Let us recall his technique in prosecuting the quest for reality in religion.

First, finding it impossible to generate of himself a religious disposition, he yielded himself in an attitude of receptivity, praying, "O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me." His mind was darkened by worldly thoughts and cares; life for him was chaotic and confused. He needed light and truth, and in his thought light and truth were two angels of God ensuring guidance and knowledge. He resigned himself passively to their control. But it was not merely a vague yearning for divine direction that he expressed. He longed for effective leadership that would assuredly carry him to the goal of his desire, which was the possession of his soul by the religious mood. So he not only prayed "let them lead me," but also "let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles."

The holy hill was, of course, Mount Zion, and the tabernacles were the courts of the Lord's House. Most ardently the psalmist wished to be brought into the atmosphere of religion, and to that end he surrendered himself in prayer to the Divine Escort. This is ever the initial step in the quest for religious experience. As Wordsworth sang:

Nor less I deem that there are powers  
Which of themselves our minds impress,

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And we can fit these souls of ours  
In a wise passiveness.

The expectant attitude of passive surrender to divine influences is the first step in the process of securing the religious mood. Anyone who is in earnest in the quest for religious experience must begin there. If you really desire to know God for yourself, to have a personal realization of his presence, then you must use the method employed by all experts in the things of the spirit. You must surrender yourself to the divine leadership. That is, you must pray, as the psalmist prayed:

O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me;  
let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles.

If the first step of the psalmist toward the recovery of the religious mood was the cultivation of a wise passiveness, the second step was deliberate and definite activity of soul. This followed naturally. Having had his spirit fed in passive receptiveness, the psalmist acted of his own volition. Observe the change in the prayer. Thus far he had prayed to be led of God, to be brought unto Mount Zion and to the temple courts, but now he declared, "Then will I go." Religious experience never ends with passivity of spirit. It merely begins there. The passive atti-

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tude is the preparation for splendid activity. The surrender of the soul to the guidance and guardianship of the eternal spirit issues in the action of the will.

After the psalmist had yielded his spirit to the direction of the Most High, he gained power to act of his own volition, and his first volitional act was penitent confession and sacrificial offering. "Then will I go unto the altar of God." The altar was the place of sacrifice for sin. In a later age, after a melancholy period of religious apostasy, and when the Israelites were again possessed of the religious mood, and moved to redeem the temple from the pollution of dust and rust incident to disuse, the first service in the renovated temple began with a sin offering for the nation. That has ever been true in human history. Every saint of God has borne testimony to that truth.

The early religious life of Luther was flooded with the spirit of almost despairing penitence. He haunted the altar and bothered his superiors with continual confession. The conversion of Wesley, which, according to his own statement, did not take place until he was thirty-five years of age, after he had been in the Christian ministry for many years, and had even been a missionary on this continent, began in abject misery for his sins. And Charles H. Spur-

geon, whose definite religious experience began in early childhood, was in the depths of perpetual distress; while yet in his teens he spent his Sundays in hearing minister after minister in the hope of having the cloud of spiritual dejection lifted from his soul. All these had earnestly prayed, "O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles." And when the prayer was answered, when the religious mood enveloped their spirits as with a garment, they likewise shared the psalmist's penitential emotion and confessed with him, "Then will I go unto the altar of God."

Whenever a soul surrenders itself to the leading of the divine light and truth and is brought within the courts of the Lord's House, its first act is one of confession. "Let thy light and thy truth lead me and bring me unto thy holy hill." That first; and next this: "Then will I go unto the altar of God."

Immediately after the psalmist's surrender to the divine direction, his first emotion was penitence; but in his experience penitence was quickly succeeded by praise—"Then will I go unto the altar of God, *unto God my exceeding joy.*" Up till then his experience had been one of descent—first, Mount Zion with its roominess, then the temple courts with their deeper intensity of religious feeling, and then the

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altar itself with its absorbing and agonizing emotion of penitence. But then the ascent of the soul began. There was a glorious change in his religious sensations, for he went on to say "unto God my exceeding joy." Thus the penitence became praise, the suffering issued in song. It has ever been so.

In the story of the reformation of religion and the renovation of the temple in Hezekiah's time, to which we have already alluded, we find an excellent illustration. You recall the familiar verse: "And when the burnt-offering began, the song of the Lord began also."

Whenever those who are impelled by the spirit of penitence approach the altar of sacrifice, they are on the verge of singing. The gloom of penitence breaks into gladness of praise because of the consciousness of pardon and peace. It was while Luther was confessing to the wise Doctor Staupitz, oppressed with the burden of guilt, that we are told, "Light sprang up in the heart of the young monk at Erfurt." It was while Wesley was sorely troubled and distressed, ever kneeling in spirit at the altar, that in the little room in Aldersgate Street he became conscious of that strange inner warmth of joy of which afterward he wrote so persuasively and so beautifully. For a long time Spurgeon had been in abject misery, "envying the very beasts in the fields and the toads by the way-

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side," as he told his son, and experimenting with numerous preachers and sects; but at last, in the little chapel in Artillery Street on a cold New Year's morning, listening to the message of a lay preacher, suddenly, to put it in his own words, "The cloud was gone, the darkness had rolled away, and that moment I saw the sun. The snow was lying deep and more was falling. But those words of David kept ringing through my heart, 'Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.' It seemed to me as if all nature was in accord with the blessed deliverance from sin I had found in a moment by looking to Jesus Christ."

Heaven above is a softer blue,  
Earth around a deeper green,  
Something lives in every hue  
Christless eyes have never seen.

Birds with gladder songs o'erflow,  
Flowers with richer beauties shine,  
Since I know, as now I know,  
I am His and He is mine.<sup>1</sup>

Such was the experience of the psalmist; and it is the experience of all who, like him, bow at the altar, the place of penitence and sacrifice. He had worshipped there in reverent fear, but at length he wor-

<sup>1</sup> Author unknown. Quoted by F. W. Boreham, *A Bunch of Everlastings*, p. 148.

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shipped in reverent joy, for God had given gladness to his heart. "Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy."

This would seem a fitting way for the psalmist to conclude his prayer, as surely it is an appropriate ending to his search for religious experience. What sublimer height of religious emotion can there be than is suggested in the words, "unto God my exceeding joy"? Anything in addition would surely prove a disappointing anticlimax. But the psalmist did not end his prayer there, and we should be false to the experience of all profoundly religious souls if we concluded thus. There is another significant sentence in our text—"Yea, upon the harp will I praise thee, O God my God."

In that phrase he soars to heights of joy which words are inadequate to express. He attains to a religious experience—that is, experience of union of his own soul with the soul of God—in the presence of which human speech is helpless. His emotions have burst the limitations of language. Because of the sheer inadequacy of verbal expression, he calls for a symbol. Words cannot express the exalted religious experience he is passing through, but the music of the harp can symbolize it. This is surely the function of music in worship. Some of the finest musical compositions are called "songs without

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words." Surely no one is so cursed with religious insensibility as not at some time or other to have felt the need for "a song without words." There are songs without words because there are joys that defy language to express them.

He who sets out upon the quest for religious experience will come to a point where even the language of prayer fails to utter all his feelings. Like the psalmist, he yields himself to a religious mood which he knows to be a gift of God. Impelled by it, he bows at the altar, gradually discovering a strange joy pervading his penitential emotion, which grows so ineffably blissful that it is beyond expression in speech and can be symbolized only in music. The communion between his soul and God has become so perfect that it can be symbolized only by the flowing together of notes which makes the bliss of music. Do not dismiss this as pious extravagance. It is not emotional drivel, but the rationalizing of religious experience of the *n*th power, and more. It is a truth that cannot be settled by argument, but only by experiment.

Like the psalmist, when our penitence has melted into praise we call for something more to express our joy in forgiveness and our rapture in resolve. May we be able to use the words of the psalmist both as a cry and a confession:



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O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles.

Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy: yea, upon the harp will I praise thee, O God my God.

Psalm 50: A Psalm of Asaph

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The mighty God, even the Lord, hath spoken, and called the earth from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof.

Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined. . . .

Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God.

These are the opening and concluding verses of the first psalm in the Psalter whose authorship is neither ascribed to David nor veiled in anonymity. Of the forty-nine which precede it, thirty-six are attributed to David, seven form a group associated with the sons of Korah, and the remaining six bear no author's name. But the fiftieth psalm is credited to Asaph, who lives in Hebrew history as a distinguished poet and musician, a contemporary of David, who apparently succeeded the sweet singer of Israel as the poet-laureate of the nation, and founded a family whose artistic genius was marked for generations. More than a hundred years after Asaph's

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death we find his name a treasured tradition and his descendants mentioned among the poets and musicians of Israel. The Asaphs of ancient Israel were in some respects like the Bachs of modern Germany in number and destiny. At a family reunion of the Bachs there were present 120 musicians. The Directory of Music names 57 renowned musicians in this family, but now there is not a single drop of this musical Bach blood in existence. Similarly Asaph founded a family which, the book of Ezra informs us, gave 128 singers to the nation, but after a few generations no one of that name was found in the annals of subsequent history.

From the half dozen references to Asaph in the historical books of the Bible we learn that he was the chief of three outstanding musicians whom David "set over the service of song in the House of the Lord." To Asaph and his colleagues was entrusted the ministry of music, both vocal and instrumental, in the religious services, and also the important task of composing appropriate musical settings for voice and orchestra of the sublime religious poetry which was one of the greatest inspirations of that generation, and which now forms part of the songs of the ages. But not only did Asaph direct the choral part of the tabernacle service instituted by David, not only did he send on wings of harmony and melody the thoughts

of God and life which Hebrew poets expressed in immortal lines of haunting rhythm and beauty; he himself was also a famous poet. He was both singer and seer, an artist who worked both in tones and words. Twelve of the poems included in the Psalter bear his name. Although the internal evidence of some of them, the fact that they describe incidents in Hebrew history which occurred long after his lifetime, compels the conclusion that they were the compositions of his descendants, yet there is little doubt that at least three of them are the products of his genius.

So brilliant were Asaph's gifts in poetry and music, and so commanding his influence, that later generations placed him on a parity with David. His superior skill as a poet received recognition from a grateful posterity, for long after his death his writings were linked with those of David by the chronicler who reported thus: "Hezekiah the king, and the princes, commanded the Levites to sing praise unto the Lord with the words of David, and of Asaph the seer." It is to be remembered that he lived in one of the greatest periods of Hebrew history, when the flowers and fruits of culture were profusely and gloriously manifest, which subsequent centuries looked back upon as Israel's Golden Age. His prominence and influence may be gauged by the fact that

his name became associated with the splendid achievements of the time, and in the book of Nehemiah we find the significant phrase: "The days of David and Asaph."

Perhaps Asaph's greatest distinction is the rare combination he presented of priest and prophet. He belonged to a priestly family, for the Levites were specially designated to conduct the religious services of tabernacle and temple. His family tradition inclined him to high regard and reverence for ritual and ceremonial. Nevertheless, although the position which Asaph held as chief conductor of the musical part of the elaborate religious services of David's day indicates the importance he attached to ceremonial in the worship of God, yet the fiftieth psalm, which came from his pen, is one of the most sweeping and vigorous denunciations in the whole range of Hebrew literature of reliance upon ritual. Few passages of the Bible so trenchantly exalt ethical requirements as the essential and indispensable condition of acceptable approach to God. A considerable portion of Holy Writ records the age-long conflict between priest and prophet. The blending of priestly and prophetic views and functions is one of the unique accomplishments of Asaph, and this we find illustrated supremely in the fiftieth psalm.

The psalm opens with the divine summons to

worship in the House of Prayer, where God reveals himself in peculiar intimacy and loveliness. "The mighty God, even the Lord, hath spoken, and called the earth from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof. Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined." To Asaph the presence of God was associated with the tabernacle in a sense and to a degree that should not be possible for us who have entered into the meaning of the great charter of religious truth, "The hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. . . . God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." Of course, there will always be places where faith is more readily quickened and God seems more near than in other places. To the psalmist, the tabernacle contained the atmosphere of religion. There the religious mood, the mood in which the fellowship with God becomes a personal experience, could best be induced.

A company of people worshiping God presents a marvelous spectacle. Cardinal Newman expressed the inwardness of it and the emotions it excites when he wrote:

How wonderful it is, if we only think of it, to see a congregation of people joining in the worship of God; rising in praise and bowing down in prayer—to whom?

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To a Being they have never seen or heard or felt. There is nothing palpable around them but the sounds and sights of earth. Yet they offer praise and prayer because they believe that such a Being is present in their midst—the King eternal, immortal, invisible. This, I say, is wonderful. No man from the beginning of the world has ever seen God, has ever heard his voice, or touched his hand in its working, or traced his footprints. Men have longed in vain for the vision of God: "Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat! . . . Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot find him." And yet in so speaking they have but testified their faith. In the same moment that they have said, "He hideth himself, that I cannot see him," they have said also, "Whither shall I go from thy presence, or whither shall I flee from thy spirit?"

To Asaph the deepest reality of the religious services of the House of Prayer was the presence of God. Just as God at the dawn of Israel's nationhood appeared on Mount Sinai amid thunder and lightnings, so to Asaph, as he states in the following verses, there is flame and storm about Him as he comes to judge his people met for worship. We must remember, of course, that the words, "A fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him," are the utterance of a profoundly poetically minded and spiritual man. As he led the people in their devotions, he was always, to use

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Zangwill's great phrase, "trembling on the verge of an apocalypse." Engaged in worship, he had visions and revelations of the Lord. Those who do not share his richly devout and imaginative spirit will remain strangers to his experience. As Francis Thompson sang,

The drift of pinions, would we hearken,  
Beats at our own clay-shuttered doors.

The angels keep their ancient places;—  
Turn but a stone, and start a wing!  
'Tis ye, 'tis your estranged faces,  
That miss the many-splendored thing.<sup>1</sup>

In Asaph's spiritual imagination the congregation of his contemporaries is compelled to hear the divine verdict upon their religious services in the tabernacle. "Hear, O my people, and I will speak." In the succeeding verses the psalmist declares God's appraisal of the ritual and ceremonial in the observance of which the people are so assiduous. The Most High admits their regularity and enthusiasm in these matters. No fault can be found with them on this score except the fault of the wearisome and mechanical monotony of their services. God seems to be nauseated with them. Asaph quotes the Lord as saying with withering disgust, "I will not reprove

<sup>1</sup> From "In No Strange Land." Used by permission of Dodd, Mead & Co.



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thee for thy sacrifices or thy burnt offerings, for they are continually before me." This sentiment coming from the lips of Asaph must have been a surprise and shock to the people. For a member of the priestly caste to speak contemptuously of the altar sacrifices, as though they were an offense to the God to whom they were offered, presented a bewildering paradox. That a consecrated leader in the tabernacle services should write a poem, one to be set to music and sung in the religious observances, representing God as indulging in stinging satire at the expense of his devotees who were offering costly animal sacrifices—this must have seemed a startling inconsistency to those whose devotions he guided. Surely a leading member of a priestly family should be expected to praise and encourage the use of ritual, not disparage, discount, and denounce it. To many Asaph must have appeared to be reversing and repudiating the whole character and practice of his life.

True, the doctrine he taught was not novel.

I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he goats out of thy folds:

For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills.

I know all the fowls of the mountains; and the wild beasts of the field are mine.

If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fullness thereof.

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Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?

Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the Most High:

And call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.

These words are but an echo of the teaching of Moses, "And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways?"; and of Samuel, "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice"; and of David, Asaph's great contemporary, "Keep innocence, and do the thing that is right; for that shall bring a man peace at the last." And if Asaph's teaching in these verses was but an echo of the ringing deliverances of Israel's noblest leaders, past and present, it was also an anticipation of similar exhortations of prophetic voices which were to sound in the ears of subsequent generations. Hosea pictured God as saying, "I desired mercy, and not sacrifice." And Jeremiah put into the mouth of the Most High this rebuke of ritual, "I spake not unto your fathers . . . concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices: but this thing commanded I them, saying Obey my voice." And Amos represented God as thundering forth the great utterance, "I hate, I despise your feast days. . . . But let justice run down as waters, and righteousness as a

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mighty stream." And Isaiah admonished. "Bring no more vain oblations. . . . Cease to do evil; learn to do well." And Micah expressed the same view in what Sir George Adam Smith called the greatest saying in the Old Testament and what Theodore Roosevelt pronounced to be the ultimate and acme in religion, "Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? . . . He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" And our Lord himself summed up the doctrine in the golden words, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets." But the authors whom I have quoted were prophets, traditional critics of priestly conceptions of religion. What made Asaph's declaration sound strange was that it came from the lips of a prominent member of a priestly family, a constituted leader of the ritualistic services of the sanctuary. His passionate protest against the ritual of sacrifice is especially impressive because of its source.

It must not be supposed, however, that he was condemning the use of symbols and ceremonial as such. His depreciation of them is not to be exaggerated into complete rejection of all external adornments in

worship. In an earlier verse he specifically calls saints "those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice." What he is antagonistic to is the conception of ritual as exhausting the expression and experience of religious feeling. In his view ceremonials and symbols should be a stimulus to and not a substitute for practical obedience and spiritual appreciation of God.

In the tabernacle in which Asaph worshiped was one of the sublimest symbols of Israel's religious life, the Ark of the Covenant, the history of which was a perpetual reminder of the use and abuse of symbols. The Ark of the Covenant was the sacred receptacle of the most sacred symbols of God's presence with his people. It was a little box measuring approximately four feet long and two and one-half feet wide and two and one-half feet high. On the lid of the box figures of cherubim were wrought in gold. The box contained a copy of the law of Moses, a golden pot of manna, and the rod of Aaron. We can easily appreciate the moral and spiritual value of the Ark. To a Philistine, or any outsider, it was only a more or less interesting box; but to a Jew it was the sign and symbol and grateful assurance of the presence of God—that God whose purpose for his people was expressed in the Ten Commandments; whose mercy was exemplified in the manna preserved

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as a memorial of his provision for their daily necessities in the wilderness; whose selection of them as his chosen ministers of blessing to their own and future generations was signified by Aaron's rod. Thus to the Israelite the Ark symbolized the presence of God, and was an unfailing source of inspiration to noble and worthy living. The history of the Ark, however, illustrates the unfortunate tendency of human nature gradually to cease to be moved by the hallowed associations of a symbol, while yet regarding it as possessing of itself some mysterious power. The Ark became a mere fetish to the Israelites. The dissolute and degenerate sons of Eli and the craven crowd they led took the Ark with them as they went to battle against the Philistines, supposing that its very presence would insure victory, apart altogether from any moral and spiritual reaction to it. But God is not mocked. They were crushingly defeated by the Philistines, who seized the Ark as a trophy of war.

We are not surprised that the heathen Philistines should have regarded the Ark as possessing magical power to help or harm, and that when trouble and disease broke out among them, they traced their calamities to the presence of the Ark. George Adam Smith points out that the land of the Philistines to which the Ark was taken was at the gateway of Syria,

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which frequently intercepts the plagues that sweep down from the Serbonian bog in the northeast corner of Egypt. The Philistines superstitiously ascribed all their troubles to the presence of the Ark, and decided to banish it from their midst.

David welcomed the opportunity of recovering the Ark and restoring it to its honored place in Jerusalem. At the head of thirty thousand men he marched in pomp and splendor to the ancient city where the Ark was, to bring it to his capital. The magnificent procession proceeded, some think, in the midst of a thunderstorm. On a specially rough piece of road the cart on which the Ark was resting shook and rattled until it seemed as though the Ark might fall out of it. One of the attendants solicitously placed his hand upon the Ark to steady it, and precisely at that moment was struck dead by a flash of lightning. The people, including David, were seized with terror and dismay, and the chronicler informs us: "David brought not the ark home to himself to the city of David, but carried it aside into the house of Obed-edom the Gittite." Apparently David at that moment regarded the Ark as an omen of ill luck. He remembered that, in spite of its presence, the Israelites had been defeated by the Philistines, and that the Philistines, who had captured the Ark, seemed to have been under some malignant

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spell wherever they carried it; and now one of his own followers who, with the best intentions, had touched it was mortally stricken. He resolved to be rid of it immediately. Later, however, he reconsidered this decision and fulfilled his former intention of returning it to his capital. He realized that the power of the Ark, which was a symbol of God's presence, depended upon the response of human hearts to the truths which it symbolized.

When its high and original associations are forgotten, degeneration is the destiny of a symbol. Kipling's book of sketches, *Mine Own People*, contains a story, "Namgay Doola," which illustrates this truth in a pathetic and amusing way. Namgay Doola rebelled against the authority of a princeling of the Indian hills, and was made virtually a prisoner in his own house. Kipling somehow gained his confidence and obtained admission to the house. As he watched Namgay Doola at his religious devotions and heard him chanting his evening prayer to the idol in its niche, he was impressed with something reminiscent. The haunting lilt of the vesper song, and the curious sense of familiarity of the words in a hybrid tongue, like and unlike the jargon of the hill tribes, demanded an explanation. As the chant was repeated, the explanation finally broke upon Kipling. He

discovered that it was an adaptation of that fine old Fenian air,

They're hanging men and women, too,  
For the wearin' o' the green.

The god on the mantelpiece proved to be the cap-badge of Namgay Doola's father, one Private Timothy Doolan, who had deserted the service of the East Indian Company and married a native woman. So what had once been the badge of honorable service and the embodiment of the traditions of a great civilizing force had at length degenerated into a pagan fetish.

The use of a symbol should never be a substitute for, but a stimulus to, worthy living. When the great Scottish hero, the Black Douglas, in a notable battle took a silver locket containing the heart of Robert Bruce from about his neck and hurled it into the midst of the enemy, he did not thereby do anything to decide the issue of the conflict; but the act inspired him to shout, "On, heart of Bruce, as thou wast wont! Douglas will follow thee, or die."<sup>2</sup> A symbol is valuable only as it affects life.

Observance of ceremonial can never be made an excuse for neglect of practical service of God. In his lecture entitled "Work," Ruskin has a passage

<sup>2</sup>I am indebted for this illustration to Hubert L. Simpson, *The Intention of the Soul*.



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which seems to me to be a fitting commentary upon the section of the psalm beginning, "I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he goats out of thy folds":

Do justice and judgment. That's your Bible order; that's the "Service of God"—not praying nor psalm-singing. You are told, indeed, to sing psalms when you are merry, and to pray when you need anything; and, by the perverseness of the evil Spirit in us, we get to think that praying and psalm-singing are "service." If a child finds itself in want of anything, it runs in and asks its father for it—does it call that doing its father a service? If it begs for a toy or a piece of cake—does it call that serving its father? That, with God, is prayer, and He likes to hear it: He likes you to ask Him for cake when you want it; but He doesn't call that "serving Him." . . . So when a child loves its father very much, and is very happy, it may sing little songs about him; but it doesn't call that serving its father; neither is singing songs about God, serving God. . . . And yet we are impudent enough to call our beggings and chauntings "Divine service": we say, "Divine service will be performed" (that's our word—the form of it gone through) "at so-and-so o'clock." Alas; unless we perform Divine service in every willing act of life, we never perform it at all. The one Divine work—the one ordered sacrifice—is to do justice.

After exposing the peril of ceremonial in worship, the danger of its becoming a substitute instead of a

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stimulus in the service of God, Asaph directs his attention to the still darker and sterner corruption of worship in hypocrisy. If ritual is a futility in the experience of one to whom it exhausts the meaning of religion, its use by hypocrites becomes a sacrilege. He whose life is the antithesis of the ethical requirements of the God before whom he bows is guilty of the worst kind of profanation. These verses burn with blistering indignation against such impiety.

But unto the wicked, God saith, What hast thou to do, to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth?

Seeing thou hatest instruction, and casteth my words behind thee.

When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him, and hast been partaker with adulterers.

Thou givest thy mouth to evil, and thy tongue frameth deceit.

Thou sittest and speakest against thy brother; thou slanderest thine own mother's son.

After thus reciting the misdemeanors and delinquencies of the worshipers, Asaph makes God say, "These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself; but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes." He condemns the people for supposing that God's forbearance means indifference to sin, for interpreting his long-suffering to mean

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that, as Omar Khayyám says, he is a "good fellow, and 'twill all be well." Sin, they thought, didn't matter; but Asaph insists that it does matter, and that worship is defiled when offered by worshipers impenitently guilty of violations of God's will and law.

Asaph believed in the temple services, with their ritual and ceremonial in the worship of God, as a means of grace, and we ought to share his belief. Of course, merely entering a church with our feet and merely glancing over a chapter of the Bible with our eyes will not make us new men and women. True, but it is worth while remembering that our presence at the worship of the church, however unresponsive or however unspiritual it may be, does at least keep us in some kind of contact with unseen realities, does at least remind us periodically that there are other things in life than those we hear and see. One reason why our churches are not better attended than they are is just that the Protestant community has learned too well that attendance upon the ordinances of the church is not a passport to salvation.

In this psalm Asaph was warning his fellow worshipers against the fallacious idea that the God whom they worshiped was pleased merely with their presence at the temple services, irrespective of their emotions there or their life outside. The psalm is a rebuke to the shallow ritualist who supposes that the

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mere performance of the act of worship is blessed of God. It is a reproof to the conscienceless worshiper who imagines that his conduct is irrelevant to his ceremonial acts. Asaph's verses commend themselves to every thoughtful church attendant who recognizes that the true function of churchly ceremonial is to assist him in the worship of God. Ritual is made for man, not man for ritual. Of itself it is powerless to change life.

Not all the blood of beasts  
On Jewish altars slain,  
Could give the guilty conscience peace,  
Or wash away the stain.<sup>3</sup>

Nor is worship in church an end in itself, but a means for the mutual speaking and hearing between our souls and God, that we may have joy and peace in him, and strength to serve him better.

O healing peace of this withdrawing place,  
O central calm that soothes storm-shaken men,  
Refresh our fainting souls, but, better still,  
Go with us to our tasks of life again! <sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Isaac Watts.

<sup>4</sup> Gertrude Bowen Webster.

Psalm 72: The Psalm of Solomon

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Give the king thy judgments, O God . . . .

It may appear impossible to reconcile the heading, "A Psalm of Solomon," with the concluding verse, "The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended." Obviously, the scribe who added these words must have been ignorant of the eighteen psalms ascribed to David found in the subsequent portion of the Book of Psalms. It seems plain that the subscription to the psalm was not an original part of it and is a contradiction of the superscription, "A Psalm of Solomon." The preposition "of" is a translation of a word sometimes translated "for." The same word in Hebrew means either "by" or "on behalf of." Some Hebrew commentators affirm that the psalm was written by David as a prayer on behalf of Solomon, his son and successor as sovereign of Israel. Others maintain that it was composed by Solomon as a supplication for God's guidance and guardianship during his own reign and, indeed, during the history of

his dynasty, which, his petition indicated, would be established forever. The erudite Oxford scholar, Professor Driver, holds that the king referred to in the psalm was one of the later kings of Israel, possibly Josiah. A large number of Bible readers interpret it as a Messianic psalm, and the Aramaic translation clearly sanctions this reading of it by its translation of the first verse, which is: "By Solomon spoken in prophecy: 'O God, give thy righteous law to the King, Messiah.'" The opinion that it is a Messianic psalm finds support in the fact that the kingly qualities specified in it closely resemble those attributed to the Messiah in Isaiah 11. The Jewish savant, Dr. Freehof, points out that the description of the king's wisdom and prosperity harmonizes also with the situation in Solomon's time, which marked the period of the most brilliant cultural and commercial and imperial development of the Israelitish monarchy.

In the absence of agreement by competent and careful authorities of Biblical criticism one cannot be dogmatic, yet no one can deny that the ascription of the psalm's authorship to Solomon clothes it with special significance and affecting tenderness. It should be remembered that the psalm is a prayer. It is thus that Moffatt translates it. "Inspire the king, O God, with thine own justice . . . that he may rule thy folk aright and deal out justice for the poor;

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may justice bring welfare to the people! . . . may he deliver the forlorn, and crush oppressors! Long may he live, long as the sun, as the moon that shines for ever! . . . From sea to sea may his domain extend, from the Euphrates to the earth's far end! May the foe bow down before him, his enemies grovel in the dust! . . . May . . . all kings do homage to him, all nations yield to him!"

The picture of Solomon in the eagerness of his young manhood standing on the threshold of his reign, looking into the future with hope and longing and praying to God in the language of this psalm, is a most affecting one. One is reminded of the touching scene of the young prince standing in the presence of his dying father, the royal David, and listening to the solemn charge:

I go the way of all the earth: be thou strong therefore, and shew thyself a man; and keep the charge of the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, that thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest, and whithersoever thou turnest thyself: that the Lord may continue his word which he spake concerning me, saying, If thy children take heed to their way, to walk before me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul, there shall not fail thee (said he) a man on the throne of Israel.

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What strong and tender emotions, what resolves of fidelity to the loftiest ideals must have thronged his heart on that memorable day!

One is reminded, too, of the mystic dream of the young king shortly after his coronation, in which the Lord appeared unto him and asked him his supreme ambition, the prize of life he desired above all else. We are moved by the humility of spirit in which he confessed his limitations and need of divine protection and leadership. A foolish and egotistical and romantic youth would have let his fancy dwell on military glory, wealth, fame, power, adulation. But the idealistic and humble Solomon asked as his crowning wish the gift of wisdom: "Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?" Small wonder we are told that "the speech pleased the Lord."

The prayer of the psalm we are studying, which is attributed to Solomon, is in perfect harmony with all that we know of his mood at the commencement of his reign. It is his conception of an ideal government. While, inevitably, his prayer involved dazzling personal honor, yet its motive was essentially unselfish, and contemplated the greater glory of God and the welfare and happiness of the people. Most



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ardently he wished to prove worthy of his exalted office, and to be a beneficent and righteous ruler. "Give the king the judgments of God in order that oppression may cease, and righteousness and peace may flourish, and the king's influence extend to earth's remotest bound and endure beyond his own day till time should be no more." Let us consider this picture of an ideal government.

You will observe that its qualities are righteousness and peace and compassion. First, righteousness which is based upon the will of God. "Give the king thy judgments, O God, and thy righteousness unto the king's son." He would steer his course not by expediency, nor caprice, nor the counsels of favorites, nor of prejudiced partisans, but by seeking first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness. He recognized that the most sacred relationship in human experience is relationship with God, and that he must be right with God if he was to deal justly in his relations with his people. The achievement of righteousness depends chiefly upon man's willingness and eagerness to do the will of God. The attempt to do justly is often fraught with serious and intricate problems. There are situations in which justice is an extremely difficult accomplishment for a government. There are portentous and complicated problems created by the presence of minorities, there are re-

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gions of moral choice where right and wrong are not plainly black and white, but where circumstances cause them to blend and present a picture of diffused gray, in which it is not easy to make moral distinctions and to pronounce a verdict which will be perfectly fair to every element in the population. Indeed, the question of personal rights is sometimes very complex. You remember that when, in answer to the question of Socrates, "What is justice?" someone said that he thought justice was paying every man his due, giving him his own, the great sage showed how in doing so injury might ensue. "If I borrow a knife from a man who later becomes insane and give him back his own, he might use it to harm himself or others." Solomon was not free from such difficulties. There were factions in the state with rival claims. A ferment of discontent was at work below the surface of the nation's life. An expanding commerce created the ever-recurring problem of poverty and wealth. Mindful of these difficulties, Solomon was consumed with an honest and passionate desire that his government should be distinguished by the enthronement of righteousness.

Now, if we believe in God at all we must believe that justice on the earth is his will for all his children. If history is the voice of God speaking through the destinies of nations and of men, then it is plain that

he is determined to build a kingdom of righteousness in the world. If man will not listen to his law and willingly accept it, then by discipline he will be purged of his sinful refusal to obey the commands of the Most High, for in the end justice must be done. In his recent book, *Youth Looks at Religion*, Professor Wickenden of Miami University finely says: "It would appear that God would prefer to lead men into the Kingdom, but if they will not be led, they will be maneuvered at great social cost into situations where they will be forced to recognize that no social order can prevail in this world which is not founded upon righteousness, justice, and love." Who that surveys the history of mankind will not agree with Professor Wickenden's pronouncement that it is God's gracious purpose to lead men into that righteousness which exalted the nation by wisdom's ways, whose ways are ways of pleasantness and all whose paths are peace, and that if they, in sinful blindness and rebellion, frustrate his benign will, he has no other recourse than the educational sufferings of successive generations? The discipline of suffering has been a highly salutary process. Wars, famines, floods, epidemics, depressions—these calamities have set men thinking and resolving. We are told that there are only two ways of producing an eye. Nature either causes it to grow out from the brain or, as in

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the case of the lower animals, to develop from the skin, as a result of the bumps received in the effort to travel blindly. Similarly, if man will not follow the promptings of his brain and heart which lead to insight into the Divine Plan, then the suffering he endures will force him to acquiesce in the purposes of God. Is it not plain that, after the Great War's dance of death was over, humanity was given a glorious opportunity to achieve a world of righteousness and brotherhood? Never shall I forget a very great sermon which I heard preached by Dr. John Clifford on September 15, 1919, less than a year after the Armistice, in the City Temple, London. It contained these burning sentences:

Never forget, the present opportunity is without a parallel in human history. Lose it, and all is lost. Let it go, and the floodgates will not be long before they open and the deluge of misery and death overwhelm us. Lose it, and the generation that follows will scorn us for our blindness and cowardice, our want of zeal and enthusiasm for the welfare of the world. The opportunity creates a sacred and solemn obligation. Before us is the chance to save the future; it is not less—the whole future! Woe to us!—unutterable woe to us if we let it slip unused! <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Basil Mathews, editor, *World Brotherhood*, Hodder & Stoughton, p. 38.

Well, we let it slip unused, yet not altogether unused. A treaty was made which, while not perfect, was nevertheless a marvel of justice, generosity, and statesmanship—certainly a very different treaty from the one which would have been imposed had Germany's war lords been victorious. The Versailles Treaty has been unsparingly condemned by people who have never read it, and criticized on the basis of statements which it does not contain and interpretations which it will not bear. That treaty contemplated peace resting on justice to all, not on armed and fortified military frontiers. It insisted on liberty of conscience as a fundamental law in countries where it had not been known. It planned the emancipation of backward races. It sought to extinguish economic animosities, and it created a tribunal to settle international disputes by negotiation and by arbitration. There were clauses in the treaty that should have been removed, and others altered and amended. The machinery was there in the treaty itself for the accomplishment of these objectives, but the machinery was not employed. Feelings of greed and vengeance were permitted to develop unrebuked and unallayed. Men did not follow the leadings of the spirit of God, and so an avalanche of catastrophe and death is once more crushing and torturing the world. Once more

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The earth is full of thunder,  
The seas are dark with wrath.<sup>2</sup>

We are blind to the teachings of the Bible if we do not recognize in these things the discipline of God, not for man's destruction, but for his deliverance from unrighteousness and his development into citizenship in the Kingdom of God. People ask how there can be a God, omnipotent and omniscient and all-good, and these things happen. But surely the wiser question is, "How could there be a God of power and wisdom and love and these things not happen?" If there is a moral order in the universe; if nations as well as men are able to perceive the difference between right and wrong, and are responsible for their actions; if there is a retributive justice in the world, and if nations in the great family of mankind are bound together so that if one member sins, all of the members suffer with it; if there is a God of nations whose decrees are sovereign and whose laws cannot be broken with impunity, then a harvest of bitterness and slaughter must be reaped from the sowing of oppression and hatred. This is not to say, of course, that there is no moral difference between the nations. If no one of them is entirely innocent, at least they are not all equally guilty. The totalitarian states have sown the wind; and the harvest,

<sup>2</sup> Rudyard Kipling, "Hymn Before Action."

alas, cannot be reaped by themselves alone. Solomon, as he contemplated the nation whose throne he had ascended, realized that righteousness that had its roots in the Divine Will was the primary and indispensable quality of a government that aspired to endure and to be a blessing to the people over which it ruled.

The second quality in his picture of an ideal government was peace, which is regarded in the psalm as a natural expression of righteousness. The Authorized Version reads: "The mountains shall bring peace to the people, and the little hills, by righteousness." And Moffatt's translation conveys the same idea: "May justice bring welfare to the people, from the very hills and mountains!" Peace can never precede righteousness, but must follow it. It is never a cause, but a consequence of justice. As Isaiah put it: "The work of righteousness shall be peace." As Paul said: "Peace to every man that worketh good," and again, "The kingdom of God is . . . righteousness, and peace." And the writer of the letter to the Hebrews represents peace as the fruit of righteousness. Thus Scripture represents peace as the result of righteousness, in the experience of both the individual and the nation.

A world that desires peace, a condition of international affairs in which no nation shall have to yield

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to violence, but where "they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more," must first of all be a righteous world. Indeed, Isaiah's great prophecy of a warless world which I have quoted is, in his language, to come into being only after God "shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people." So long as we do not have some system of collective security among nations righteousness will be thwarted, just as it would be thwarted in a city but for a system of collective security. So long as there is one nation determined to plunder another nation, or even to achieve what it regards as its rights by blood and threat, there never can be peace. World peace demands world co-operation in the accomplishment of righteousness. There is no nation on the face of the earth whose people want war; there are very few governments that believe in war as an instrument of national policy; but so long as we live in a world where even two or three nations consider treaties to be "scraps of paper" we shall not have peace. So long as there is no world tribunal with authority to settle disputes between nations and with adequate force at its disposal to secure obedience to its findings, peace will continue to be an unrealized dream. The acknowledgment by all nations of the



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sanctity of contractual obligations, the inviolability of the pledged word, the sacredness of human personality, the just consideration of the rights of helpless minorities, will alone bring peace to a distracted and war-torn world. Only when righteousness is enthroned will the clouds of war be forever banished from the sky and the sunshine of peace flood the world with its beauty and beneficence. In a poem in the Second Book of Samuel called the "last words of David" the blessings of a righteous reign are likened to the life-giving sunshine of a cloudless morning, when after rain the earth appears clad with fresh young verdure:

When one ruleth over men righteously,  
Ruleth in the fear of God,  
Then is it as the light of the morning when the sun  
ariseth,  
A morning without clouds, when through clear shining  
after rain the young grass springeth out of the earth.<sup>3</sup>

Solomon's insight in praying, "May justice bring welfare to the people," is vindicated by the human experience of the ages.

The third in the trinity of qualities which characterize Solomon's conception of an ideal government, and which he prays will distinguish his own reign, is compassion for the weak and oppressed.

<sup>3</sup> II Sam. 23:3b-4; trans. of S. R. Driver, *The Ideals of the Prophets*, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1915.

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For he will deliver the needy when he crieth;  
The poor also, and him that hath no helper;  
He will have pity on the feeble and the needy,  
And the lives of the needy he will save;  
He will redeem their souls from oppression and  
wrong,  
And precious will their blood be in his sight.<sup>4</sup>

What a gracious picture of government! Solomon resolves that he will use the power and wealth at his command to champion the forlorn and the weak, to rescue the victims of violence and oppression. In a world of grief and graves he will not be indifferent to the sufferings and death of the persecuted and the martyred. "Precious will their blood be in his sight." His government will not be a bulwark of special privilege and tyranny, but a fortress from which perpetual warfare will be waged against the evil forces which afflict the poor and the defenseless and the sad. The inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness of every citizen will be the special care of the state. But Solomon is not content to pray that righteousness, peace, and compassion shall be realized in his reign in the creation of an ideal government. He prays that such a boon may be the heritage not only of the population within Israel's boundary, but may become the possession of all mankind. "From

<sup>4</sup> Ps. 72:12-14; trans. of Driver, *op. cit.*

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sea to sea may his domain extend, from the Euphrates to the earth's far end! May the foe bow down before him, his enemies grovel in the dust! May the kings of Tarshish (a city or a country far over the sea) and of the isles pay tribute to him. May the kings of Sheba (the northern coast of Arabia) and Seba (probably in Ethiopia), that is to say, may all kings do homage to him, all nations yield to him." It was not an ambition of military glory and victory to accomplish the servitude of the world, but an ambition to extend the blessings of civilization, of justice, peace, mercifulness, to all the children of men. Nor is he content to pray for a beneficent world-wide sovereignty. He desires that the government he seeks to establish shall endure beyond his own lifetime, and last so long as suns and moons rise and set. He hopes that forever man may be able to rejoice in the blessings of justice and peace and kindness. Yea, and in prosperity and human fertility also. "May there be abundance of corn in the land upon the top of the mountains, may the fruit thereof shake like Lebanon, and may men blossom out of the city, like the herbage of the earth." Such were the prayers and splendid anticipations of Solomon just after his coronation. In its quality his reign was to be righteous and peaceful and merciful, and in its scope it was to be universal and eternal. His humility and reverence and

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consciousness of God are expressed in the closing words of his prayer:

Blessed by the Lord God, the God of Israel,  
Who only doeth wondrous things;  
And blessed be his glorious name for ever:  
And let the whole earth be filled with his glory.  
Amen, and Amen.

The melancholy fact is that Solomon's prayer was not realized for himself, nor has it ever been fulfilled in the history of man. A pessimistic view of life suggested by the present condition of the world would lead one to despair of any prospect of its realization. But faith declines to take a pessimistic view. Faith is based not on the present look of things, but on the eternal nature of things, as revealed by God in his Word, and especially in the Word made flesh. It is a true instinct that has led readers of the Bible to regard this psalm as Messianic, as a prophecy of the reign of Christ. Only in him can there be such an ideal government. Only when the governments of earth are laid upon his shoulders shall there be universal justice and peace and mercy. As George Bernard Shaw said, "I see no way out of the world's troubles except the way that Jesus would take if he were to undertake the task of practical politics." Someday the world will be wise enough to follow Christ's way. In this faith let us live and strive, for

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faith is not only an affirmation, but an act; not only belief that expresses itself in words, but in appropriate action. Even the humblest can do his part in the ushering in of that glorious dawn which may be delayed, but cannot be destroyed—when earth shall witness

Something kindlier, higher, holier—all for each and each for all. . . .

Earth at last a warless world, a single race, a single tongue.

Every tiger madness muzzled, every serpent passion kill'd,  
Every grim ravine a garden, every blazing desert till'd,

Robed in universal harvest up to either pole she smiles,  
Universal ocean softly washing all her warless Isles.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Tennyson, "Locksley Hall Sixty Years After."

Psalm 73: A Psalm of Asaph

## THE ANTIDOTE TO CYNICISM

Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches.

Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency.

For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning.

If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children.

When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; .

Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end.

The seventy-third psalm, of which our text is a part, is ascribed to Asaph, who was one of the most famous and brilliant poets and musicians of his generation. Of the details of his life the historian furnishes disappointingly meager information, but our ignorance of them is, after all, of little consequence. The most valid and illuminating source of our knowledge of any poet is not to be found in his genealogy nor family life nor the gossip of his contemporaries.

## THE ANTIDOTE TO CYNICISM

The fact that Keats was the son of an ostler who married the daughter of a livery-stable keeper, or that Byron was the lineal descendant of Scottish kings, or that Burns was born in a house of mud, thatched with straw, or that Longfellow entered the world in a home of comparative luxury—such facts tell us nothing really worth knowing about these poets. The most authentic source of information concerning them is in the wealth of poetry they have bequeathed to us. It is there we discover the quality of their souls, the trials that tested them, the emotions that swept over their spirits, the convictions they cherished, the faith that sustained them. Likewise, the poems which Asaph gave to the world are a mirror in which we behold the reflection of the man.

To Asaph is attributed the authorship of twelve of the psalms in the great book of Hebrew praise. From them we learn that Asaph was a poet of patriotism, celebrating in deathless song the outstanding events of his nation's history. But like every true poet he was not merely a reciter. He was also an interpreter of life, unfolding the eternal significance of past and present episodes, hearing the voice of God speaking through the experiences of the nation. The fact that his writings are included in the Bible proves his pre-eminence as a religious poet. He proclaimed the will of God and interpreted the longings of the human

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heart for knowledge of the Divine. He laid his finger upon the nation's pulse, and sang in clear notes what it was trying to say. Thus the products of his pen remain a revelation of his time, a revelation of himself, and, because he was a truly great poet, they prove a revelation of the souls of those who read.

The element of universality is the unfailing mark of great poetry. The true poet is the contemporary of every age, because he deals with thoughts that are inherent in human nature of every century and condition. It is just as well that Asaph is a dim and shadowy figure, because every age, reading his timeless message, can clothe his personality with the incidental and superficial features of its own time. Certainly the seventy-third psalm is strikingly modern in tone and thought and temper. It might have been written in one of this month's magazines. It handles a theme on which most of us can speak with the authority of experience. Listen to his confession of cynicism, and tell me if you do not find in it the echo of sentiments you have felt in certain moods:

For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm.

They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men.



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Therefore pride compasseth them about me as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment.

Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish.

They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily.

They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth.

Therefore his people return hither: and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them.

And they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High?

Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches.

Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency.

For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning.

This cynical mood was begotten of a sense of contrast between the wealth of the worldly and the poverty of the pious, between the apparent satisfaction and security of those who live as though there were no God and the troubles and trials of those who honestly seek to serve him. Asaph instinctively felt that righteousness ought to bring riches, that piety should issue in peace, and, conversely, that sin should result in suffering, atheism in affliction. He found from bitter experience that such is not always the case. His life had been devoted to the service of God; but

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it is obvious from the psalm that he had been the victim of distress, perhaps physical or social or financial, or all three. On the other hand, he observed that many who lived for themselves alone and never bowed the knee in prayer, enjoyed ease and comfort and plenty. They were happy in their life and untroubled in their death. He envied them their prosperity. "Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain." Virtue may be its own reward, but in his experience there had been no other reward. Vice does not bring any penalty of pain, but rather much profit. The sun shines upon the unjust as well as the just. Thus was he tempted to accept the creed of the cynic, to believe that materialism is indeed the way, the truth, and the life, that he had better cease trying to live for noble ends and resign himself to purely selfish considerations. It is a temptation which we have all felt in certain moods. Indeed, it is the root temptation of all others—the spirit of cynicism that haunts all high moods. Craftily, insidiously, it seeks to lower somehow the lights of the soul, to slay ideals, to betray and deliver us to base-mindedness.

Present world conditions provide an unusual opportunity for this temptation. The reign of violence in Europe, the unconcealed contempt for freedom and reason by the dictator governments, the rape of small nations, "truth forever on the scaffold, wrong

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forever on the throne," the dislocation of economic conditions with its consequent frustration to millions of mankind—all these grim and disheartening realities of our day are the weapons with which cynicism attacks the citadel of the soul and creates the desolating suggestion that we live in an unfair, or at least a morally indifferent, world in which, as Carlyle in angry despair remarked, "God doesn't do anything."

Asaph's ancient complaint against the triumph of wickedness and injustice: "How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High? Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches," has found its dreary echo in uncounted human hearts in every generation, including our own, since its first bitter utterance. It sounds the deep moaning undertone of the world's skepticism and cynicism, disillusionment and despair.

But Asaph found the antidote to cynicism. Just when he was about to deny his former faith and to embrace the worldling's creed, he reflected: "If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children." He pictured to himself a generation growing up bereft of ideals, without spiritual consciousness, living for material ends alone. At the thought he was seized with sickening horror. What a hell this earth would be if it were populated by a race totally destitute of faith in God! If he

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should proclaim his philosophy of pessimism, what a curse of premature sophistication would blight the growing boys and girls in his own home! He thought of the younger generation standing on the threshold of life, looking out upon the future with infinite hopes and exalted ideals, and his thought was akin to that of Eliza Cook in the couplet,

Why should we strive with cynic frown  
To pull their fairy castles down?

If there were no altruistic youths, no idealistic maidens, if the next generation should devote itself solely to the winning of wealth and the pursuit of pleasure, how disgusting and dreadful would this world become! He felt that to cast doubt upon faith in spiritual values, however scorned by the sensual; in a soul of goodness, however hidden from our gaze, would be a cruel sin against the rising generation. Something fine within his soul checked his utterance, saying to him, "Ah yet, consider it again." He was led to test the creed of materialism by Kant's rule of universalizing the individual. "So act," said Kant, "that the maxim of thy will can at the same time hold good as a principle of universal legislation." That is to say, multiply yourself in imagination by the number of people you know, and consider the result of their adoption of your code and practice.

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What kind of a world would this world be  
If every person were just like me?

By such reflections Asaph was imperiously prevented from giving utterance to his cynical thoughts. "If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children."

In a softer mood he sought the sanctuary of God, and in its atmosphere of worship meditated deeply upon life. Three great truths visited him. First, he saw that the adoption of the cynic's philosophy means suicide of soul. "My heart was grieved," he says; "so foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee." The brute lives for physical enjoyment and carnal pleasure, and in assenting to the creed of the materialist Asaph saw that he was sinking to the level of the brute. The man who denies the higher laws of life and rejects all faith in the unseen powers is really dead. In arriving at this view Asaph approximated Christ's teaching on life and death. Jesus never conceived life to be merely the flowing of the blood and the movement of the physical organs, nor death to be only the ceasing of the heart to beat. In the habitual thought of Jesus life was something infinitely brighter, and death was something infinitely darker. Jesus called the materialist a fool, because he did not understand that "this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus

Christ, whom thou hast sent." Jesus used the word death only to describe the destruction of the divine in the human personality. "Let the dead bury their dead," he said to a man who had caught a vision of the nobler life and was in danger of disobeying it. "The maid is not dead," he said to those who mourned as though their little daughter were lost to them forever. "This my son was dead, and is alive again," he said, speaking of one who had wasted his substance in riotous living in the far country and had returned to the father's house. Because he has shut his eyes to the diviner views of life, the cynic has really ceased to live. "What is a cynic?" asks a character in one of Oscar Wilde's plays. "A cynic," answers the other, "is one who knows the price of everything, but the value of nothing."<sup>1</sup> How cleverly the worldling can calculate the cost of things, he knows nothing of their spiritual significance, of their larger relationships, of their eternal worth. The cynical mood is, therefore, the most dangerous enemy of the human soul, because it aims at nothing less than its destruction. Robert Louis Stevenson was right in his conclusion: "I hate cynicism above everything else. I hate it a great deal worse than I hate the devil; unless, perhaps, the two were the same thing."

As he pondered in the sanctuary another truth

<sup>1</sup> *Lady Windemere's Fan.*

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came to Asaph. He saw that the philosophy of the cynic meant the utter loss of final peace. Looking abroad on the world of men who were living as though there were no God, he found that dependence upon worldly possessions did not deliver them from the possibility of terror. There are crises in human experience that cannot be met in the strength of worldly wealth. When sickness and distress come, all the riches of earth are inadequate to quiet the heart. "How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors." Someone has defined peace as "the possession of adequate resources." Clearly that was Christ's meaning when he said to his disciples in the hour of peril and anxiety: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." Peace is being equal to the problem. Peace is the consciousness of adequate resources for every emergency that life can bring. Such peace is the fruit of faith, of fellowship with God, and the cynic knows it not. Because he craved this inward calm, Asaph rejected the cynic's creed. He did not become resigned to his personal tribulations by the thought of the future anguish of those who trusted in the philosophy of materialism. Merely remembering that the wicked and wealthy man is going to get his de-

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serts someday never made a saint. Asaph overcame the temptation to cynicism because he saw that it was pathetically inadequate for the tests of life and time and death. He learned that enduring peace is the possession only of the trusting and loyal soul.

In the discovery of this truth, as of the former, the psalmist anticipated the teaching of Jesus. How convincingly Christ revealed that peace of heart which is independent of earthly place and power and possessions. Knowing not where to lay his head, rejected by his generation, crucified as a condemned criminal, the victim of the enmity of the rich and the mighty, he was never disturbed out of a rich serenity of spirit. Those who were clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day never knew a peace like his. In the tragic experiences of life the cynic is the prey of terror, and he who is tempted to the cynical view must reckon with that melancholy fact. It was this discovery that made Asaph cry: "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever."

The third truth that came to Asaph, as he brooded upon life in the sanctuary, was that this world is a fitting school of faith. If the man of faith met no baffling storms on life's sea, if his voyage were always



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lighted by the stars and sped by favoring breezes, morality and spirituality could scarcely remain realities. Such heroic sentiments as,

And, because right is right, to follow right  
Were wisdom in the scorn of consequence,<sup>2</sup>

would lose their essential nobleness and cease to stir the heart to gallantry if fidelity to ideals inevitably brought material gain. It is the darker experiences, the trials and tribulations to which the righteous are liable, that make faith vital and valuable and give meaning to such words as Asaph's "Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand." If virtue were certain to bring any other reward than the consciousness of doing virtuously, it would cease to be virtue. To retain its essential character virtue must be sought for its own sake alone. As Carnegie Simpson puts it: "If the rain fell on the land only of the virtuous farmer, if calamity should depend on character, if gravitation should involve the sinner but exempt the saint from injury, then virtue would be prudential rather than moral, and goodness the saving less of the soul than of the skin."<sup>3</sup>

The faithful soul is not immune from "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune." The very best

<sup>2</sup> Tennyson, "Oenone."

<sup>3</sup> *Facts of Life*.

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of those who love and serve the Lord are kith and kin in this respect to the very worst of those who live as though there were no God. The author of one of the loftiest and most reassuring of the psalms makes this pronouncement: "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace." So we feel it ought to be, and so it often is, thank God; but not always, thank God, or we should have all sorts of shrewd, calculating, cold-blooded people practicing righteousness for the sake of its rewards. And such is the end, too, sometimes, of people far from upright or perfect; and perhaps we should not grudge some outward peace and comfort to those who have so little within. To regard this world as anything less than a school of faith, a discipline through which man arrives at fellowship with God, is to rob the soul of its dignity and potential greatness. As Dr. J. Sparhawk Jones, my brilliant and beloved predecessor in my Philadelphia pulpit, said:

While selfish and sensual men may imagine that praying and preaching is a small business, Christianity makes it the chief part of its errand to affirm that such attempts upon man's spiritual nature are infinitely more significant than the din of the street and the agitations of the caucus and the noisy clatter of this mechanical world, and that if it were not for man's religious potentialities, his capacity to know and enjoy God and to come into practical sympathy with him, it would not have been worth while

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to carpet a globe like this, arrange its sceneries, and hang its starlights, and marshal its epochs, and ordain its seasons, and kindle sun and moon to give it light, and bid its centuries file past crowded with wars, migrations, tumults, civilizations, creeds and a ceaseless flux of changes, simply to afford a soulless monkey a chance to play his fantastic tricks.<sup>4</sup>

To succumb to the cynical view of life is to reduce ourselves to "soulless monkeys playing fantastic tricks." But man made in the image of God will not permanently regard himself as just a little higher than the apes, but rather as just a little lower than the angels. When we give ourselves to reflection as Asaph did in the sanctuary of God, seeing life steadily and seeing it whole, communing in the depths of our own spirit with the Eternal Spirit, we shall say to the cynic, "Get thee behind me, Satan"; we shall refuse to blight the young with false views which mean suicide of soul and utter loss of final peace, but we shall face life in the spirit of Christ, subordinating everything and using everything, whether it be pleasant or painful, to the august purpose of entering into the friendship of God, joining with Asaph in his sublime conclusion: "It is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all thy works."

<sup>4</sup> J. Sparhawk Jones, *Seeing Darkly*, p. 139. Used by permission of the Presbyterian Board of Christian Education.

Psalm 88: The Psalm of Heman

A CRY FOR COMFORT

O Lord God of my salvation, I have cried day and night before thee.

The psalm which begins with these words is one of the less popularly known. Very seldom does one find any treatment of it in homiletic or devotional literature. Still less known among Bible readers is its author, Heman. The only allusion to him of which I know in religious literature, apart from commentaries on the Psalms—and even so meticulous a commentator as Alexander McLaren does not even mention Heman's name in his exposition of the psalm attributed to him—is found in Bunyan's immortal allegory *The Pilgrim's Progress*. In the course of his conversation with Hopeful, Christian, after relating the thrilling story of the attack upon Little-Faith by the ruthless bandits Faint-Heart, Mistrust, and Guilt, recalls how these three marauders had had the temerity to engage in combat with some of the great saints and heroes of old, specifying David, Heman, Hezekiah, and Peter, and saying, "How did these

sturdy rogues and their fellows make David groan, mourn, and roar? Yea, Heman, and Hezekiah too, though champions in their days, were forced to bestir them when by these assaulted; and yet, notwithstanding, they had their coats soundly brushed by them. Peter, upon a time, would go try what he could do; but though some do say of him that he is the prince of the apostles, they handled him so that they made him at last afraid of a sorry girl."

To most Bible readers David, Hezekiah, and Peter are familiar names, but it would puzzle many of them to identify Heman. Even so learned and habitual a reader of the Bible as Robert Southey, who was poet-laureate of England a century ago, seems never to have heard of Heman. Among some forty books standing to his credit is an edition of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Evidently Southey was much perplexed by the sentence, "Yea, Heman, and Hezekiah too, though champions in their days, were forced to bestir them when by these assaulted." Apparently Heman was a stranger to him, and he concluded that the name Heman must be a misprint for Haman, and since he knew that Haman, the builder of gallows in the book of Esther, could not have been regarded as a champion of faith, he serenely erased the word and inserted in its place the word Mordecai. It was an absurd and inexcusable error for a man of letters

to make, and it could have been avoided by the simple expedient of consulting a dictionary of the Bible.<sup>1</sup>

The name is found in the Old Testament as belonging to one of the three musicians to whom David committed the conduct of the choral part of the Tabernacle services, and also as belonging to one of the four preeminent savants in the reign of Solomon. Many scholars believe, for what appear to be cogent and convincing reasons, that these two are the same man. Accepting this conclusion, we are able from the scant but significant scriptural references to Heman to form a vivid and vital conception of him. He belonged to a family distinguished for prophecy and statesmanship in the history of Israel, and was personally famous in poetry and music. He was also recognized as a great sage, one of the wisest men of his generation. So generally admitted was his title to wisdom that when the historian desired to acclaim Solomon as the supreme sage of his day, he could find no more convincing and conclusive argument than to affirm that he was even wiser than four universally acclaimed savants, including Heman.

Heman did not give his name, as Asaph did, to a school of music, nor was his genius transmitted, as

<sup>1</sup> Southey's mistake is alluded to by S. A. Cox in his *Expositions*, III, 124.

was Asaph's, to his descendants. Nor, as in the case of Asaph, did he write much that immortality took from time's careless keeping into her own. Indeed, the only product of his pen that has been preserved is the eighty-eighth psalm.

Of course, it was not because of his skill in music, nor his wisdom as a seer, that he found a place in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, but because of the revelation of himself which he gave in the solitary and somber poem he wrote, and which was destined to be forever enshrined in the sacred writings of the Hebrews. Because of his spiritual struggles and sorrows which we are permitted to view through the window of this psalm, the Puritan dreamer pictures him as suffering violence at the hands of the "sturdy rogues" Faint-Heart, Mistrust, and Guilt. That Bunyan should have linked a Biblical character so little known as Heman with ones so well known as David and Hezekiah and Peter is a splendid tribute to his intimate knowledge of Holy Writ. To repeat the quotation concerning Heman from Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*: "Yea, Heman, and Hezekiah too, though champions in their days, were forced to bestir them when by these assaulted; and yet, notwithstanding, they had their coats soundly brushed by them." Bunyan's authority for stating that the renowned musician and seer, the wise and artistic Heman,

found his religious faith assaulted and menaced during his earthly pilgrimage was solely the gloomy character of the psalm which bears his name.

From the first sentence to the last the psalm is one long wail of anguish. The soul of the writer was in the depths of despondency. Every thought he expresses was born of agony and tears, freighted with the weary burden of a broken heart. It is the plaintive protest of a tortured spirit against the baffling frustrations and accumulating miseries inflicted by the "heartache and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir too." It is a cry for comfort issuing from the lips of one oppressed by the loneliness and the mystery of life. The sickness of soul which it portrays is more a malady of the mind than a moral problem created by a troubled conscience. The sadness it breathes is intellectual rather than ethical, and therein lies its peculiar pathos. We do not find in it any expression of penitence for wrong-doing, such as made the misery which inspired the fifty-first psalm, in which David confesses and laments his moral guilt. Heman's sorrow was not born of sin. His melancholy was that of a man old and sick and lonely, a man of culture and learning, who takes a profoundly pessimistic view of human affairs. It is the product of a reflective and speculative mind that has devoted much thought to the mystery of death



and what to him was the unmitigated tragedy of the grave.

In manifesting the frame of mind depicted in the psalm Heman was the child of his age. Although born in the time of David and attaining to the first rank as poet and musician when David was king, Heman lived through a large part of Solomon's regime, and his sensitive spirit felt the full impact of the new cultural and commercial influences of that period. It was a time when commerce was expanding and scholarship was accorded unprecedented appreciation. The ancient literature and traditions of Israel were receiving the concentrated attention of studious critics. The prevailing temper of skepticism and speculation inevitably created a critical examination of the foundations of faith. Men perplexed in faith faced the specters of their mind. Problems of Providence and the eternal mystery of man's destiny beyond death haunted the minds of spiritual and scholarly men like Heman, and these questions are the subjects of this psalm.

An age like our own, under the influences of scientific and philosophic, and hospitable to new ideas in all departments of human interest, which makes best sellers of books like *The Story of Philosophy*, *The Art of Thinking*, and *The Rediscovery of Religion*, must be composed of many people who across the

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ages greet in Heman a kindred spirit. The vogue of psychoanalysis is in part due to the results in numerous minds of an inability to harmonize faith and facts. Like Heman they are made unhappy by circumstances beyond their control, problems they cannot solve, and reflections which destroy their peace of mind. Doubts and misgivings, coupled with the dreadful frustrations of life, have produced in the older members of our generation a spiritual condition akin to that portrayed by Heman.

It would be difficult to exaggerate the gloom which pervades the psalm. The opening verses reveal his painful consciousness of the gathering infirmities of age:

O Lord God of my salvation, I have cried day and night before thee:

Let my prayer come before thee: incline thine ear unto my cry;

For my soul is full of troubles; and my life draweth nigh unto the grave.

I am counted with them that go down into the pit: I am as a man that hath no strength.

The sunset of his days was clouded. Frailty made life a futility; physical weakness made it a burden.

From the calamity of old age made grievous by sickness and weakness he passes to the acute distress

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caused by the isolation from and the alienation of friends:

Thou hast put away mine acquaintance far from me;  
thou hast made me an abomination unto them: I am  
shut up, and I cannot come forth.

It is a sadness, sometimes an illusion, extremely distressing to one who is old and ill and weary, but there is no illusion about the loneliness and pain of bereavement which is the common and inevitable accompaniment of age.

Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness.

One of the penalties of longevity is the tragedy and sorrow of outliving one's friends. When those to whom one's soul has been knit by enduring affection made stronger and tenderer by the sharing of life's joys and griefs, successes and failures, are removed by the ruthless hand of death, the bereaved heart knoweth its own bitterness. Of course, this is not the exclusive experience of age. The poet Byron was only in his thirty-sixth year when he wrote those mournful lines which are an echo of the sentiment of this psalm:

My days are in the yellow leaf;  
The flowers and fruits of love are gone;  
The worm, the canker, and the grief  
Are mine alone!

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Heman, himself, seems even from his youth to have combined with his artistic and intellectual temper a skeptical and speculative disposition. In the fifteenth verse he intimates that while still young he was given to brooding upon the painful problems of existence and was even then weary of life.

I am afflicted and ready to die from my youth up:  
while I suffer thy terrors I am distracted.

In certain moods Heman would have understood the Persian sage when he said:

Myself when young did eagerly frequent  
Doctor and Saint, and heard great Argument  
About it and about; but evermore  
Came out by the same Door wherein I went.

There was a Door to which I found no Key:  
There was a Veil past which I could not see:  
Some little Talk awhile of Me and Thee  
There seemed—and then no more of Thee and Me.<sup>2</sup>

In Heman's mind there was not only suffering because life ebbs out its little day in weakness and futility, in loneliness and mystery, but there was also resentment against God whom he addresses as the author of all the pain and bitterness of experience.

Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps.

<sup>2</sup> Edward FitzGerald, *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*.

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Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves. Selah.

Thou hast put away mine acquaintance far from me; thou hast made me an abomination unto them: . . .

Lover and friend hast thou put far from me.

But while these utterances express a complaint, they also express a creed. Heman directs his accusations and anguish, his skepticism and sorrow, to God; and if there is complaint there is likewise a measure of confidence.

O Lord God of my salvation, I have cried day and night before thee:

But unto thee have I cried, O Lord; and in the morning shall my prayer prevent thee.

He did not abandon himself to blind and blatant unbelief. Although his native faith was "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought," it had not ceased to exist. Although the sky of his faith was covered with clouds of doubt, yet there were rays of the conquering sun of his faith gilding the clouds with their glory and sending their sovereign light into his soul. As he assisted in the conduct of the services of the sanctuary he may have preferred the plaintive airs of minor strains of music and the somber sentiments of despondent poets rather than doxologies set to jubilant tunes, but he failed not in his attendance upon the worship of God. The tragedy and pathos of life,

in his case, did not induce spiritual suicide. In this respect, at least, Heman sets a worthy example—he took his doubt and dejection and despair to the God of his fathers.

Throughout this psalm we find the mind of this sagacious and spiritual man dwelling upon the mystery of the soul's destiny after death. His speculative temperament and his religious faith led him to endeavor to penetrate the veil of mystery that hangs between this world of sense and the world of spirits beyond the grave. He found it impossible to escape this theme. What thoughtful human being can keep his thoughts always from contemplating the unknown future? The imperative and mystic trek, which begins at the end of earthly life, compels attention. Heman knew that very soon he would fare forth to explore those shadowy regions beyond the mysterious door of death, now sternly sealed to him, whose existence he could neither demonstrate nor deny, but of whose reality he had no doubt. His thoughts of life after death were full of questioning and fear. They were filled with the current and traditional dogmas on the unbroken darkness of Hades, its shadowy and cheerless existence.

Wilt thou shew wonders to the dead? shall the dead arise and praise thee? Selah.

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Shall thy lovingkindness be declared in the grave? or thy faithfulness in destruction?

Shall thy wonders be known in the dark? and thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?

It may be that these were not merely rhetorical questions to Heman, but the statement of problems to which his own answer was not in complete accordance with the dogmas of his day. It may be that contemporary views on the subject were both intolerable and incredible to him. It may be that he was groping for a nobler and more satisfying conception of the future life than that sanctioned and accepted by the current theology. Of this we cannot be certain. At any rate he did not attempt to find refuge in atheism, nor in spiritualism. Speculative though he was, he nevertheless avoided the occult. This was not because of lack of opportunity. We may suppose that the Witch of Endor, whom Saul consulted a few years before Heman's birth, was not the only spiritualistic medium in Israel, and that she was not without successors, but Heman sought no answer to his questions from these sources, which seemed to be largely a reckless combination of fraud and credulity. Heman's example in this regard is worthy of emulation. He contented himself with addressing his questions to God, instead of consulting other earthly travelers as fallible and ignorant as himself.

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The self-drawn portrait of Heman in this psalm reveals a man desperately in need of comfort; not of a material sort, for there is no suggestion that he lacked in this respect, nor comfort in the sense of pardon for some grievous sin, for there is no hint of a dark and ugly past in Heman's life. What he craved beyond telling was spiritual comfort in the assurance of the care of God for this life and that which is to come. He was old and weak and lonely. He was drawing near the verge of the gray mystery and he longed for the comfort of assurance. As far as we know he received none. The psalm which begins with the words, "O Lord God of my salvation," ends with the sad and significant word, "darkness." Small wonder that Heman's psalm has never proved a popular favorite.

But is this all that can be said concerning the issues raised in this psalm by Heman, with whose speculative temperament many today can deeply sympathize? Are we to adopt Heman's thoughts about life and death simply because they are in the Bible? Are we to cherish the moods that seized him? No, we are not bound by the Psalmist's limitations. T. R. Glover tells of the remark of an old sea captain of his father's boyhood to the effect that he did not believe in the Old Testament because, if it was good enough, why did they get a new one? The Scriptures



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plainly prove the doctrine of progressive revelation. Knowledge of God grew from more to more, reaching its consummation and crown in Jesus Christ. If we will read this psalm whose author says, "My soul is full of troubles: and my life draweth nigh unto the grave," and then read the fourteenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. John, where Jesus says, "Let not your heart be troubled. . . . In my Father's house are many mansions," we shall perceive the vast difference which Christ has made in our thoughts of life and immortality. Although, like Heman, we are so made that our thoughts seek to penetrate the impenetrable future, if we are forced to speculate concerning the "undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveller returns," yet, unlike Heman, because Christ has come, our thoughts are not tinged with melancholy but flooded with the light of his glorious revelation. If Christ had not come we should still have cherished the hope of immortality, even as Heman did, though perhaps with a happier outlook than his.

It is an old belief  
That on some solemn shore,  
Beyond the sphere of grief,  
Dear friends shall meet once more,  
Beyond the sphere of time  
And sin and fate's control,

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Serene in changeless prime  
Of body and of soul.  
That creed I fain would keep,  
That hope I'll not forego.  
Eternal be the sleep  
Unless to waken so.<sup>8</sup>

Because of the resurrection and revelation of Jesus Christ we find our dreams and speculations not reduced to the cold dead ashes of the prevailing theology of Heman's distant day, but kindled into a flame of desire and brightly burning with lofty hope and assurance, and we lift our voices in the grand doxology of the New Testament, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which . . . hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

This is our confidence, that because Christ lives we too shall live. Our heart's desire, like the desire of Heman for the country within the veil, is that the lovingkindness of God shall be declared in the mystic glory of the yonderland. All the cries for comfort that are voiced in this psalm are answered in Jesus Christ. When we hear Heman pray, "O Lord God of my salvation, I have cried day and night before thee," our souls, rejoicing in Jesus Christ, reply: "We have not an high priest which cannot be touched

<sup>8</sup> John Gibson Lockhart, "Beyond."

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with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." When we hear Heman's bitter complaint, "Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness," our hearts, looking to Him who brought life and immortality to light, answer, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" The faith exemplified by Heman is a struggling faith, but the faith we learn from Jesus is a resting faith.

We look through pity's tears upon Heman overwhelmed by doubt of the power and presence of God to lead the soul of man through the gates of death to a larger, richer, more abundant life, because we look up with unspeakable gratitude to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; to our Father who has touched with hope each secret sorrow of the earth and taught us through the teaching of his Son, our Saviour, and by his conquest o'er the grave, that all is better farther on, and we reflect and pray:

O sweet and blessed country,  
The home of God's elect!  
O sweet and blessed country  
That eager hearts expect!

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Jesus, in mercy bring us  
To that dear land of rest;  
Who art, with God the Father,  
And Spirit, ever blest.\*

\*Bernard of Cluny, "Jerusalem the Golden," trans. by John Neale.

Psalm 89: The Psalm of Ethan

## WHEN FACTS AND FAITH COLLIDE

Lord, where are thy former lovingkindnesses, which thou swarest unto David in thy truth?

There are two persons in the Bible called Ethan, the name of the author of this psalm, but, as in the case of Heman, the author of the preceding psalm, scholars have concluded that the two Ethans were the same person. He is one of the least known, and yet one of the most fascinating figures that moves across the pages of Scripture. While the Biblical references to him can be numbered on the fingers of one hand, and while this psalm is the only writing of which we know that bears his name, yet, as the lightning flash piercing the night may momentarily reveal a whole countryside, leaving upon the mind an accurate and indelible impression, so the fleeting glimpses we are permitted to catch of Ethan make him stand out in our thought, a distinct and impressive figure on the waving skyline of Jewish history.

He was a sage and scholar, musician and poet, one

of the most celebrated personalities of his day. He lived under three monarchs of Israel—David, Solomon, and Rehoboam. We know that he gained distinction as an artist and man of culture in David's reign, and, from the internal evidence of the psalm attributed to him, it is certain that it could not have been written before the fifth year of Rehoboam's reign. So Ethan must have attained a great age; and the poem, the only product of his pen which has come down to us, was the rich fruit of his ripest reflections.

Born when David was king, he had witnessed the golden age of Israel's nationhood and lived through the long and tranquil reign of Solomon. He had beheld the imperial and cultural expansion of his nation in this memorable period. Then in the early, turbulent and disastrous years of Rehoboam's sovereignty he had seen his people torn by civil war and David's kingdom reduced to a tiny province scarcely fifty miles square, and his king, David's grandson, degraded into a vassal of Egypt, the ancient adversary of Israel. Thus Ethan in his long life had known both sunshine and storm, triumph and tragedy, as he shared the varying fortunes of his nation.

I have called him a sage and scholar, and the appellation is justified by the Jewish historian's reference to him in the midst of a eulogy of Solomon. In

the first book of Kings we read: "And Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men; than Ethan the Ezrahite." The verse continues with the record of the names of three other savants equally famous and distinguished, but it is only in Ethan that we are interested at the moment. A man whose reputation for wisdom was so popularly known and conceded that the chronicler of Israel's history complimented Solomon by saying that he was even wiser, must have loomed large in the life of his time as a sage and scholar. I have called him a musician because the writer of Chronicles informs us that he was one of the conductors of the orchestra which played in the services of the sanctuary. Ethan is revealed in the history of his nation as a man of broad culture, of vast wisdom, of superior musical ability, and his skill as a poet is attested by his authorship of the eighty-ninth psalm. The beauty and majesty of its lines, the depth and loftiness of its sentiments, the universality of its appeal because of the problem with which it deals, stamp its author as a master of the cryptic thing called expression. He had the melody and magic, the gift and glory of words. Some of his sentences have taken their place among the most quoted and familiar passages of Holy Writ:

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I will sing of the mercies of the Lord for ever: with my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations. . . . .

God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him. . . . .

Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face.

Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance.

As we read the psalm we are persuaded that the author was a man of profoundly religious inclinations, facing problems of faith that are not yet out of date. He was typical of those spiritual experts who found their supreme joy not in sensuous pleasures, nor in worldly wealth, nor in the pride and pomp of place and power, but in the spiritual satisfactions of meditation and prayer. He was convinced of that fundamental law of the universe laid down in the ancient Scripture, written deeply in the nature of man, and confirmed by the teaching of Jesus—that "man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord."

Let us recall the setting of the psalm, the circumstances which inspired Ethan to write it. It scarcely needs to be said that in order to arrive at any conclusion concerning the background of the psalm we must study it in its entirety. It was evidently written



about the fifth year of the reign of Rehoboam, when the kingdom of Israel had been rent by revolt and conquered by Shishak, the reigning Pharaoh of Egypt. Because of Rehoboam's oppressive taxation and his arrogant refusal to accept the advice of the elder statesmen, one of whom was probably Ethan, ten of the twelve tribes of Israel revolted against him, and the once glorious kingdom of David was reduced by the folly of his grandson to a tiny principality. Not only did the degenerate son of Solomon alienate the ten tribes by his tyranny, but both he and his followers merited the denunciation of the true prophets of God by departing from the religious beliefs and practices of his father and grandfather, and by indulging in the foulest vices of the neighboring idolatrists. At this time, probably prompted both by his vaunting ambition and by his knowledge of the internal strife of the Jews of Palestine, Shishak, the ruler of Egypt, invaded the homeland of the Jews, captured Jerusalem, seized the treasures of the temple and the palace, and imposed the payment of tribute upon Judah. The Hebrew historians do not tell us that Rehoboam himself was carried into Egypt to grace his conqueror's triumph, but sculptures found in the Egyptian village of Karnak, famed for its ruins of ancient Egyptian temples, would seem to indicate that it happened. In one of the monumental

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pictures at Karnak, Shishak is depicted as presenting before his god, Amun, a man of characteristically Hebrew cast of countenance described as "King of Judah." One is justified in inferring from this that the Jewish people had been conquered by Shishak, and Rehoboam, the king, taken captive into Egypt.

When these facts of history are borne in mind—the dismemberment of the nation by the revolt of the ten tribes, and the invasion and conquest of Palestine by Shishak—the psalm is invested with deep interest. It is not merely a great poem, but the treatment of a vital problem of faith. It becomes the transcript of the emotions of a sensitive soul, witnessing a collision between his faith in God and the facts of experience. In the first thirty-seven verses Ethan recalls in language of rhythmic beauty the covenant which God had made with David. He remembers that God had sworn unto David, "Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations." In the most absolute and unconditional terms God had pledged himself to establish the kingdom of David and his seed forever, to drive back all his adversaries and to maintain the throne for himself and his successors as long as the sun and moon should endure. God had promised that even if David's children should break his statutes and forsake his law, though he must, in the language of the psalm,

"visit their transgressions with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes," yet his mercy he would not take from them, nor suffer his faithfulness to fail. "My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that has gone out of my lips."

Then, in the last fifteen verses of the psalm, Ethan faces the reality of the situation—the here, the now, the grim forlorn about him. He laments that the king of Judah, the anointed of the Lord, has been dishonored and discrowned, the nation's defenses smashed, its army defeated, and that the fateful word Ichabod, "thy glory hath departed," must be written over the land. In these circumstances Ethan addresses God in a way that seems to go beyond the bounds of reverent remonstrance. "Thou hast made void the covenant of thy servant," he said. He reminds the Almighty that though he had sworn unto David, "Thy seed will I establish forever, and build up thy throne to all generations," yet almost immediately after the grandson of the man to whom he gave this promise had ascended the throne, ten out of the twelve tribes seceded from the nation. But his destiny of disgrace was not yet fulfilled. Very soon his diminished kingdom was demolished by its powerful enemy, Egypt, and he himself reduced to a puppet sovereign. Thus the fair promises of God to David had as their sequel dark and unrelieved tragedy.

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The Almighty had said, "My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips." Yet, if the fact of this divine utterance was beyond dispute, it could not be denied that its terms seemed hopelessly blotted out in the harsh yet just fate of the next-to-immediate successor of its recipient, and the terrible afflictions of his people. How could Ethan, confronted by the bitter contrast between God's covenant with David and the political facts of the disastrous year in which he wrote, avoid profound agitation of soul? He was facing a problem only too sadly familiar in human experience. Christians believe that God has made the supreme revelation of his character and purpose in Jesus Christ. Nineteen hundred years have passed since Jesus Christ dwelt among men, and the Kingdom of God has not yet been established in the earth. There is a contradiction between our hope in Christ and the realities of things, between our faith in him and the facts of life.

The collision between faith and fact, between what we hope from God and what life has brought us, is likewise witnessed in the experience of individuals. Down through the ages men have prayed to God protestingly in the spirit of Ethan, in the words of our text: "Lord, where are thy former lovingkindnesses, which thou swarest unto David in thy truth?" Different men tormented by this problem have reached

different conclusions. Many modern thinkers, like John Stuart Mill, have concluded that the overwhelming deluge of calamity and suffering which has been and still is the cruel fate of hundreds of thousands of innocent and helpless human beings, demonstrates either a deficiency in goodness or power in the character of God. They have said that the Most High cannot be both all-good and all-powerful, or he would not tolerate the continuance of tyranny and woe in the world. This problem has always bewildered the troubled spirit of man. It is older than Ethan and fresh with every new generation. Ethan is confronted by the same dilemma. If God is really good, surely he would not permit the perpetuation of evil and suffering if he were powerful enough to prevent it. If God is really omnipotent, then he would not allow the tides of suffering to buffet his helpless creatures, unless there were a lack of love in his heart. The solution which Ethan achieves is the antithesis of that of many modern philosophers. He doubts neither the power nor the goodness of God. He looks abroad upon the powers of nature and finds there ample evidence of the omnipotence of the Most High.

O Lord God of hosts, who is a strong Lord like unto thee? . . .

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Thou rulest the raging of the sea: when the waves thereof arise, thou stillest them.

Thou hast broken Rahab in pieces, as one that is slain; thou hast scattered thine enemies with thy strong arm.

The heavens are thine, the earth also is thine: as for the world and the fulness thereof, thou hast founded them.

The north and the south thou hast created them: Tabor and Hermon shall rejoice in thy name.

Thou hast a mighty arm: strong is thy hand, and high is thy right hand.

Nor is he less sure of God's goodness than of his greatness, for he proceeds to express his unhesitant faith in it in the following verse: "Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face." Acquaintance with the grievous misfortunes of his people and the overthrow of David's dynasty in the person of his grandson, Rehoboam, had neither dimmed nor diminished his ultimate belief either in the justice or the mercy of the Lord. The verse was quoted by an American president when tragedy and threatened rioting and bloodshed visited the nation. When Lincoln had been assassinated, when the population of New York was mad with passion, when a single blundering word might have provoked conflagration and massacre, Garfield appeared before the excited mob and after

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securing attention said: "Fellow citizens, justice and judgment are the habitation of his throne."

Ethan announced this creed, this faith both in the goodness and power of God, when facts seemed to contradict it. He knew the pledge which God had given to continue his mercy to the descendants of David, even though they broke his commandments:

And I will beat down his foes before his face, and plague them that hate him. . . .

His seed also will I make to endure for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven.

If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments;

If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments;

Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes.

Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail.

My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips.

Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David.

His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before me.

It shall be established for ever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven.

No conditions were attached to the divine promise. It was absolute, and yet it seemed to have been vio-

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lated by events. The throne which David established had been disgraced and defeated in the reign of his grandson; internal strife had divided it and external foes had destroyed it. The king himself had become subject to a foreign power. What then was the basis of Ethan's faith? By what process of reasoning could he reconcile the facts of shame and disaster with the faith he professed? He admitted the facts.

But thou hast cast off and abhorred, thou hast been wroth with thine anointed.

Thou has made void the covenant of thy servant: thou hast profaned his crown by casting it to the ground.

Thou hast broken down all his hedges; thou hast brought his strongholds to ruin.

All that pass by the way spoil him: he is a reproach to his neighbors.

Thou hast set up the right hand of his adversaries; thou hast made all his enemies to rejoice.

Thou hast also turned the edge of his sword, and hast not made him to stand in the battle.

Thou hast made his glory to cease, and cast his throne down to the ground.

The days of his youth hast thou shortened: thou hast covered him with shame.

Yes, he could not deny the facts, but faith triumphed over them for he immediately proceeds to plead:

How long, Lord? wilt thou hide thyself for ever? shall thy wrath burn like fire?



Somehow a joy sought him through his pain. In spite of the darkness of the times there was a light that followed all his way. Somehow his head was lifted up by the very cross on which his hopes had been crucified. He believed that God would not hide himself forever. His terrible judgments would not utterly destroy, because they were intended for discipline and not destruction; which discipline would issue in deliverance, for that was its purpose. The acknowledgment of the justice of God's retributive operations in the world was never more humbly made, nor faith that their purpose is discipline and not destruction was never more hopefully expressed, than by Abraham Lincoln in his second inaugural—which the *London Times* called the most sublime state paper of the century—when the noble American President said:

Fondly do we hope—fervently do we pray—that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn by the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said: "The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether."

Surely this indomitable trust in the power and goodness of God in the midst of misfortune and

misery, this resolute conviction that the pains and sorrows of time have a purpose beyond themselves and speak of the mercy as well as of the severity of God, is what we need to sustain us in this shadow world. The problem that confronted Ethan is the one with which we are faced. In a world shadowed by the horrors and agonies and crimes of war; darkened by clouds of division in the Church of Christ, a Church so broken and dismembered that no one would dream that Christ had prayed that his followers should all be one; in a world where the innocent suffer as the guilty, we must walk as Ethan did, by faith and not by sight. And when sight brings doubt and misery to our hearts, faith is the refuge of the believing soul which still trusts, though it cannot trace, the power and the love of God which work in ways beyond our ken for the redemption of the children of men. This, at least, was Ethan's conclusion which enabled him in the midst of tribulation to sing of the mercy of the Lord as enduring forever and of his faithfulness as prevailing in all generations. Such a faith alone gives dignity and value to human life.

I remember well my old teacher, Professor Law, telling his students immediately after the news of the *Titanic* disaster reached my native city, that on that morning he met a man in the street who said, "I should be sorry to think God had anything to do with

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it." To which Dr. Law replied, "And I should be sorry to think God had not everything to do with it." Such a faith, I say, gives dignity and value to our thought of the souls of men. If it is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God, how much more dreadful it is to feel that one has fallen out of them.

It is by this faith that out of the plowed soil of disaster and sorrow spring the flowers of fruitful moods and labors. Lincoln, sustained by this faith in the most trying times of the Civil War, uttered those sublime speeches which shall never die; Tennyson, languishing in the depths of grief for the loss of his friend, gave the world his noblest poem, "In Memoriam"; Milton, in the midnight of blindness, told the world about Paradise regained; Beethoven, afflicted with deafness, unable to hear the glories of his genius, produced that immortal music which has enriched the world; Helen Keller, imprisoned in both darkness and deafness, has made the whole world better by the sweetness of her songs and the heroism of her life.

Most wretched men  
Are cradled into poetry by wrong;  
They learn in suffering what they teach in song.<sup>1</sup>

Even Jesus, we are told, was made perfect through

<sup>1</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Julian and Maddalo."

suffering. Like the noble souls of subsequent generations, Ethan walked by faith and not by sight. Not that he perfectly resolved the problem and stated it in lucid speech, but that he believed that God was fulfilling his promises in ways incomprehensible to his creatures, but clear to his all-wise and all-powerful goodness. Such a faith has implications for life. Richard Roberts somewhere defines a Christian as a man for whom the Kingdom of God has already come, who lives in it now, whatever the consequences, as though it were actually here. Such a faith is an indispensable factor in the preservation of serenity and the resolution to achieve.

Only as we appropriate Ethan's spirit, as expressed in his only contribution to the Book we call the Word of God, shall we cleave to the conviction that justice and judgment are the habitation of God's throne and that mercy and truth go before his face. Only so can we pray in the words and spirit of George Matheson, behind whose darkened eyes there dwelt so great a soul:

O Love that wilt not let me go,  
 I rest my weary soul in thee;  
 I give thee back the life I owe,  
 That in thine ocean depths its flow  
 May richer, fuller be.

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O Cross that liftest up my head,  
I dare not ask to fly from thee;  
I lay in dust life's glory dead,  
And from the ground there blossoms red  
Life that shall endless be.

Psalm 90: The Psalm of Moses

“GOD OF OUR FATHERS,  
KNOWN OF OLD”

Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations.

The music of this sublime composition, from which our text is taken has been described as sad and stately. The psalm has been called the funeral hymn of humanity. Rightly interpreted, it is fundamentally neither mournful nor funereal, for it sings the glorious fact of God's eternity, and his concern for man. Man's life may be fleeting and his experiences fluctuating amid the “change and decay in all around I see,” yet the transitoriness of human life and the impotence of man in the grip of forces beyond his control are set in bold and blessed relief against the shining background of the sheltering heart of God. The psalm is less a Dead March for the finiteness of the individual than it is a Hallelujah Chorus for the interest in man of the omnipotent and everlasting God. Its use in funeral services is explained not only by its painfully graphic presentation in magnificent imagery of the truth expressed in Gray's “Elegy”:

“GOD OF OUR FATHERS, KNOWN OF OLD”

The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,  
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,  
Await alike the inevitable hour:  
The paths of glory lead but to the grave,

but also by its expression of our instinctive and unquenchable confidence and conviction that our fragile humanity, confronted by the bafflements of life and the mystery of death, may still find shelter and security in God, as emphasized in the hymn by Isaac Watts:

O God, our help in ages past,  
Our hope for years to come,  
Our shelter from the stormy blast,  
And our eternal home.

Properly understood, then, the psalm is essentially not a dirge, but a chant of triumph. While it tells that man is mortal and asserts the awful brevity of his life on earth in tones approaching lamentation, yet in tones of exultation it glorifies the sovereignty of God and clings in childlike trust to him as the soul's help and home. Though the moaning undertones of man's frailty and fleetingness sound through the music of this psalm, there rises the melody of God's everlasting power and purpose for the sons of men, to which the reflections upon the transitoriness of human life become subsidiary and supporting counterpoint.

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Alexander McLaren expressed the feelings of countless readers of this lofty and majestic poem in every century and country when he stated in words of rare beauty and power the comfort we may derive from the thought of God as the home of our humanity. The eloquent and saintly English preacher wrote: "As some ancestral home shelters generation after generation of a family, and in its solid strength stands unmoved, while one after another of its sometime tenants is borne forth to his grave, and the descendants sit in the halls where centuries before their ancestors sat, so God is the home of all who find any real home amidst the fluctuating nothings of this shadowy world."<sup>1</sup> Perhaps Wordsworth was indebted to this psalm for the suggestion of his oft-quoted lines:

Trailing clouds of glory do we come  
From God, who is our home.

To be assured of God as the eternal Creator and Sovereign of the universe, and also as the native place of the human soul, is to be able to sing with Sidney Lanier:

As the marsh-hen secretly builds on the watery sod,  
Behold I will build me a nest on the greatness of God:  
I will fly in the greatness of God as the marsh-hen  
flies

<sup>1</sup> "The Psalms," in *Exposition of the Bible*, III, 233.



“GOD OF OUR FATHERS, KNOWN OF OLD”

In the freedom that fills all the space 'twixt the marsh  
and the skies:

By so many roots as the marsh-grass sends in the sod  
I will heartily lay me a-hold on the greatness of God.

This is the only psalm attributed to Moses, and the claim of his authorship of it has survived the most searching criticism. Its phrasing and ideas bear the imprint of his personality. The opening sentence, which addresses God as the dwelling place of man in all generations, corresponds exactly in thought and language to the memorable sentence in the great hymn of praise which Moses sang just before his death, as recorded in the book of Deuteronomy, “The eternal God is thy refuge.” The thought of God as man’s refuge and dwelling place was apparently congenial to the mind of Moses. The moving passage referring to the consciousness of sin and the shortness of life and the union of the two: “Thou hast set our iniquities before thee. . . . The days of our years are threescore years and ten. . . . So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom,” is reminiscent of, and might well have been suggested by, the experiences of Moses and his people in their wanderings in the wilderness, when conscience and spiritual insight alike saw the wages of sin in the numerous nomads’ graves of the desert. While Moses himself lived beyond threescore years

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and ten, yet the generation that died in the wilderness must have lived within the span of life indicated in the psalm. The noble and inspiring conception of God as the dwelling place of the soul was natural to a man like Moses, who lived on terms of intimate friendship with the Most High and whose mind was illumined and awed by the august sense of the Eternal's guidance and guardianship of Israel throughout her history. It was to Moses that God revealed himself as the Eternal Now, the Everlasting "I Am," the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the dwelling place of successive generations. Throughout his long and strenuous life Moses was sustained by his faith that God was his refuge, and that his everlasting arms were ever about him. As the writer of the letter to the Hebrews puts it, Moses "endured, as seeing him who is invisible." He knew the joy of the old man in the Faber poem:

Always his downcast eye  
Was laughing silently,  
As if he found some jubilee in thinking;  
For his one thought was God;  
In that one thought he abode,  
Forever in that thought more deeply sinking.

After asserting with sublime eloquence the timelessness of God, Moses immediately declares his eternal concern for man.

“GOD OF OUR FATHERS, KNOWN OF OLD”

There are few verses in the Bible that have been more tragically misunderstood than the verse which reads, “Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, Return, ye children of men.” As it stands in the King James Version, it sounds as though the Infinite Creator took a kind of sadistic delight in dooming his creatures to death. A flood of light is shed upon Moses’ thought when we learn that the word here translated “destruction” should be rendered “contrition,” and is so translated elsewhere in the psalms; as, for example, in the tender sentence, “The Lord . . . saveth such as be of a contrite heart.” What a beautiful conception of the eternal God is given in the words which accurately translate what Moses actually wrote: “Thou turnest man to contrition; and sayest, Return, or repent, ye children of men.” Thus we are presented with the gracious dealings of the eternal God, the true home of the soul, with his wayward children. Such a statement was particularly applicable to Israel’s sons and daughters in their frequent moral and spiritual failures in the desert, and applicable, too, to all the prodigal and far-wandered children of men through the ages even until now. It chases the shadows from the face of the Eternal and lights up the homeward path to God for every man.

When we review the past with its days of checkered

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light and shade, its sunlit triumphs and its cloud-begirt failures, and wonder about the unknown future, such a thought of God and his compassion for us comforts and inspires us to new hopes and noble resolves. As we read the psalm let us carry with us the beauty and strength of the idea of God's love and care, with which the psalm opens, as a lamp to shed light upon the darker reflections voiced in the verses which follow.

For now the psalmist seems wholly absorbed in the pathetic fleetingness and feebleness of a single human life. The timelessness of God and the transitoriness of man are set in an antithesis which tremendously emphasizes both. To God a thousand years are but as yesterday and as a watch in the night, while man is as frail as a bit of flotsam or jetsam borne upon the bosom of a resistless flood, and his life as brief as a breath. Although the pathos of mortality has been the theme of poets and philosophers through the centuries, and although Moses lived at a remote period of history, yet his description of the brevity of life and the impotence of man to avert his final destiny has never been surpassed. "Thou carriest them away as with a flood," is a metaphor of almost terrifying vividness. It suggests a tidal wave of the sea running mountain-high, with a hurricane behind it bringing destruction to the cities on the shore and death to the

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inhabitants therein; or the rolling rushing of a mighty river in flood, smashing and overflowing all barriers as its warring strife of waters sweeps away crops and houses, and tosses and torments the helpless human beings in its path, soon to be turned to corpses swirling away to their ocean grave. Thus

Time, like an ever rolling stream,  
Bears all its sons away.<sup>2</sup>

Swiftly the psalmist changes the metaphor and likens men to the grass which groweth up in the morning only to be withered ere evening by the fierce heat of the sun. Again he alters the figure and compares human life to a tale that is told; and the Hebrew word for tale is synonymous with breath. Our days, says Moses, are as transient as a single word we utter. It is to be remembered that the psalmist regards the inexorableness and appalling rapidity of death's conquest of life as the natural and inescapable harvest of human sin. Mortality is the divine judgment upon man's disobedience. Moses was persuaded of this by his experience as Israel's leader in their wilderness wanderings. It was out of the lessons taught him in those desert years that the haunting sentence was born: "For we are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we troubled." This reflection of Moses

<sup>2</sup> Isaac Watts.

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finds its fitting paraphrase in Paul's so dreadful dictum, "The wages of sin is death."

Thus the psalmist passes from the thought of the transitoriness of life to its terror. The terror of life is created by conscience, which has been called "God's vice-regent in the soul" or "God's most intimate presence in the soul." It is related that when Abraham Lincoln was a boy, wandering in the woods one afternoon, he was about to throw a stone at a robin when he heard something within him rebuking and commanding him to drop the stone, which he did. Upon reaching home he asked his mother, "What is it inside me that sometimes speaks to me?" "Abe," was the reply, "heaps of people would tell you that the voice you hear is the voice of conscience, but really, my boy, it is the voice of God." The illiterate but profoundly intelligent and religious mother who uttered these words spoke wisely and truly. Cardinal Newman, in one of his eloquent chapters in *The Grammar of Assent*, supported the same idea thus:

If we feel responsibility, are shamed, are frightened, at transgressing the Voice of Conscience, this implies that there is One to whom we are responsible, before whom we are ashamed, whose claims upon us we fear. If, on the wrongdoing, we feel the same tearful, broken-hearted sorrow which overwhelms us on hurting a mother; if, on doing right, we enjoy the same sunny serenity of mind,

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the same soothing, satisfactory delight which follows on receiving praise from a father, we certainly have within us the image of some Person to whom our love and veneration look, in whose smile we find happiness, for whom we yearn, towards whom we direct our pleadings, and in whose anger we are troubled and waste away.

All of which is but an echo of the words of Moses in our psalm: “Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance.”

The terror of life is awakened by the voice of conscience, the witness of God in the soul. It makes us aware of our responsibility for our conduct and character. How keenly Moses felt this is evidenced in a statement which as it stands in the King James Version is vague and obscure almost to the point of meaninglessness: “Even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath”; but the Revised Version clarifies the statement by translating it, “Thy wrath is according to the fear that is due unto thee.” That is to say, God’s displeasure with man is in proportion to our failure to yield to him the reverence which is his right. Distinguished and scholarly commentators such as Ibn Ezra, the Spanish-Jewish savant of the eleventh century, and Kimchi, the erudite French Jew of the early thirteenth century, hold that this verse declares that there are degrees of human responsibility, that there are men whose training and

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knowledge of divine truth impose upon them the duty of a larger measure of reverence than is the case with others whose heredity and environment have afforded them only limited religious education and privileges. Our advantages are the measure of our responsibility.

Every sensitive soul is dominated by the two truths of transitoriness and terror, which are the theme of the verses we have just been considering. The recurring anniversary of the earth's annual journey round the sun reminds us all of the swift and remorseless flight of time. The clock and the calendar are impressive reminders that time marches on. Thoughtful young people feel this as keenly as the old. Milton had only attained his twenty-third year when he wrote:

How soon hath Time, the subtle thief of youth,  
Stolen on his wing my three-and-twentieth year!  
My hasting days fly on with full career,  
But my late Spring no bud or blossom shew'th.

Sir Walter Scott was only twenty-seven when he placed as an inscription on his sundial the three Greek words meaning "The night cometh." Carlyle was not yet out of his twenties when there came to his mind the conception of his first book, in the pages of which he wrote: "Work while it is called day, for the night cometh wherein no man can work." And



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Jesus, himself, was still young when he uttered the words which Carlyle quoted: “I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.”

As we enter into the chamber of memory and in retrospective mood survey its walls that are hung round with pictures of days departed never to return, the terror of life is apt to afflict us with shuddering and dismay. Rossetti’s wail of anguish awakens a kindred emotion in our souls:

The lost days of my life until today,  
What were they, could I see them on the street  
Lie as they fell? Would they be ears of wheat  
Sown once for food but trodden into clay?  
Or golden coins squandered and still to pay?  
Or drops of blood dabbling the guilty feet?  
Or such spilt water as in dreams must cheat  
The undying throats of Hell, athirst alway?  
I do not see them here; but after death  
God knows I know the faces I shall see,  
Each one a murdered self, with low last breath.  
“I am thyself! What hast thou done to me?”  
“And I—and I—thyself,” (lo! each one saith,)  
“And thou thyself to all eternity!”

But Moses does not conclude his psalm on the melancholy notes of transitoriness and terror. He ends as he began, on the triumphant note of trust in God who is our dwelling place. He robs the transi-

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toriness of life of its power to depress his spirit and banishes the terrors of conscience by the prayer of trust with which the psalm closes:

So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.

Return, O Lord, how long? and let it repent thee concerning thy servants.

O satisfy us early with thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.

Make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil.

Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children.

And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us; and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.

In this same spirit of trust the three whom I mentioned—Milton, Scott, and Carlyle—conquered their consternation at the thought of life's brevity, and forced it into the service of the soul, making it an impulse to resolute effort. Thus they filled the flying hours of life's short day with varied and voluminous labors that earned for them unique and immortal fame, and they did it under the pressure of the thought that the night cometh, that we spend our years as a tale that is told. So did Moses. He prayed for grace so to number his days that he might be wise. The sense of the brevity of life stirred him to earnest

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endeavor to make sure that the work of his hands might be established through the graciousness of God. Alas, Moses never reached the Promised Land of his dreams. He died with the goal of his ambition visible, but unattained and unattainable. The achievement with which he had expected to crown his career was never realized by him. It was reserved for other hands to fulfill the task he had hoped to accomplish. Perhaps the knowledge that this would be so inspired the prayer that the glory of God would appear unto his children. He looked into the future with a sense of security and serenity, because of his trust that God rules and reigns and will bring every noble dream to fulfillment and every righteous purpose to fruition. If this is our faith as we stand at the portal of the opening year, we, too, shall not yield to dismay or despair, but shall say with the poet:

It fortifies my soul to know  
That, though I perish, Truth is so:  
That, howso'er I stray and range,  
Whate'er I do, Thou dost not change.  
I steadier step when I recall  
That, if I slip, Thou dost not fall.<sup>3</sup>

But not only did his trust give him the victory over the transitoriness of life, but over its terror also. It

<sup>3</sup> Arthur Hugh Clough, "With Whom Is No Shadow of Variableness."

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may seem that the majesty and grandeur of the conception of God furnished by this psalm, as our dwelling place in all generations, as One to whom a thousand years are but as a day or as a watch in the night, puts an intolerable strain upon our intellect and imagination, and so dwarfs our little life as to remove him completely from any care or concern for his finite creatures; yet the more we ponder it in all its infinite splendor, the more we are inclined to find in it, as Moses did, the very refuge we need, and, indeed, the only conception of God that can satisfy the soul. Faber's prayer expresses our thought perfectly:

O Majesty unspeakable and dread!  
Wert thou less mighty than thou art,  
Thou wert, O God, too great for our belief,  
Too little for our heart.

But greatness which is infinite makes room  
For all things in its lap to lie;  
We should be crushed by a magnificence  
Short of infinity.

But what is infinite must be a home,  
A shelter for the meanest life,  
Where it is free to make its greatest growth  
Far from the touch of strife.

And when we read this psalm in the light of the revelation of Jesus Christ who taught us that the

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God who is humanity's dwelling place in all generations is the loving Father of each individual soul, and that not even a single sparrow is beyond his love and care, then we gladly and gratefully make its sentiment our own, and go forward under his guidance and guardianship, knowing that in his mercy every good work of our hands shall be established, and believing that the love of the God of our fathers, known of old, will be with us through our earthly life and beyond.

I know not what the future hath  
Of marvel or surprise,  
Assured alone that life and death  
God's mercy underlies.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> John Greenleaf Whittier.

## Psalm 100: An Anonymous Psalm

### THE DOXOLOGY

Make a joyful noise unto the Lord.

The Pauline paradox, "as unknown, and yet well known," aptly describes this psalm. Its date is uncertain, its authorship a mystery. The circumstances of its production are still debated by recognized authorities; even its English translation is a controversial subject. Both Jewish and Christian scholarship are irreconcilably divided on the question of its origin. The distinguished Jewish exegete, Moses Bottenwieser, holds that it is an ancient liturgical hymn which was sung in the sanctuaries of pre-exilic Israel and that its sentiment is purely national. He renders the first verse, "Sing aloud unto the Lord, all ye people of the land." But Solomon Freehof, in his popular but erudite commentary, asserts that it summons all nations to worship God, and he interprets the first verse, "Shout unto the Lord, all the earth."<sup>1</sup> Interestingly enough, these authors pub-

<sup>1</sup> *The Book of Psalms*, Union of American Hebrew Congregations, Cincinnati.

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lished their contradictory conclusions in the same year, 1938. Each of them is supported in his view by Christian expositors, past and present. Thus, because its historic setting is wrapped in obscurity, the psalm fits into the first phrase of the familiar paradox, "as unknown."

And yet, because of its common and uninterrupted use through the centuries of Jewish and Christian history since its first triumphant chanting, it must also be pronounced "well known." No psalm is used more frequently in the regular services in the synagogues of Israel across the world today. No psalm is more often heard in Christian worship.

Its familiar paraphrase beginning, "All people that on earth do dwell," ascribed to the Reverend William Kethe, a Scottish divine and friend of John Knox, and published first in 1561, is found today almost unchanged from its original composition in every hymnbook in Christendom. Ten years before its publication the noted French religious musician, Louis Bourgeois, had written a stately tune for a paraphrase of the one hundred and thirty-fourth psalm. Competent students inform us that Kethe's version of the hundredth psalm was composed to be sung to this tune. Prothero, in his valuable little volume, *The Psalms in Human Life*, states the simple truth when he says, "'All People that on Earth Do

Dwell,' composed by William Kethe and set to the music of Louis Bourgeois, survives all the changes of thought or fashion that the progress of four centuries has witnessed."

The Reverend William Kethe's paraphrase evidently achieved immediate popularity, for Shakespeare mentions it as a matter of common knowledge in his play *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, printed forty-one years after the publication of the Anglo-Genevan Psalter, in which Kethe's version of the hundredth psalm was first given to the world. The Bard of Avon in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* represents Mrs. Ford as intimating that there is as little natural connection between the words and character of Falstaff as between the hundredth psalm and the tune, "Green Sleeves." It would be incongruous, so she indicates, to sing the sacred words of the ancient singer to the tune, "Green Sleeves," which was associated in the public mind with frivolous words. Shakespeare's allusion is proof of the instantaneous fame attained by the Christian hymn derived from the ancient psalm of Israel. Since then its popular use has been unceasing and increasing.

Longfellow in his *The Courtship of Miles Standish* tells how John Alden, having made his way through the Plymouth woods, came within sight and sound of Priscilla's new-built home and



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Heard, as he drew near the door, the musical voice of  
Priscilla  
Singing the hundredth psalm, the grand old Puritan  
anthem,  
Music that Luther sang to the sacred words of the  
psalmist,  
Full of the breath of the Lord, consoling and comforting  
many.

Thus, on this continent, while the shadow of the  
forest still fell upon the young land, the soul-stirring  
strains of the hundredth psalm rang out from pioneer  
homes and hearts.

It is probably true that today there is not a moment  
when from somewhere in our world the rhythmic,  
sonorous lines of Kethe's paraphrase, sung to the  
melodious and majestic measures of Bourgeois' im-  
mortal air, do not rise to heaven from some wor-  
shiping heart. One might adapt a memorable pas-  
sage in one of Daniel Webster's speeches to say,  
"Christianity has dotted over the surface of the whole  
globe with her churches and homes, whose morning  
song, following the sun and keeping company with  
the hours, circles the earth with one continuous and  
unbroken strain of hymns of praise to the God and  
Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," and the one heard  
oftenest is the hundredth psalm in the wedded har-  
mony of Kethe's words and Bourgeois' music. Per-  
haps the most familiar four lines of English poetry

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ever written and sung are Thomas Ken's three-hundred-year-old Christian adaptation of the lofty sentiment of this noble psalm:

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;  
Praise him, all creatures here below;  
Praise him above, ye heavenly host:  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

The hundredth psalm may be accurately described as "well known," for its haunting phrases and various paraphrases and adaptations have been woven into the minds of generations of believing souls extending back for centuries beyond the Christian era. Yet it may correctly be called "unknown" so far as its authorship and historic setting are concerned. In the absence of agreement on these questions among exegetical authorities no one may be dogmatic, yet one need not refrain from indicating the conclusions to which, in his judgment, the probabilities point. There would seem to be strong internal evidence in the psalm itself and a sound psychological reason for believing that this psalm is of post-exilic origin.

In the first place, accepting the translations of Moffatt, Powys-Smith, and Freehof, in opposition to Battenwieser, to confine oneself to representatives of contemporary scholarship, the psalmist's appeal to all the earth to praise the Lord clearly suggests the post-exilic period of Israel's history. The catholicity

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that embraces all lands as the object of the divine love and care was born in Hebrew thought of the travail of the bitter experiences of the Exile. Pre-exilic writers did not entertain such a sentiment. They conceived of Jehovah as a tribal deity whose jurisdiction was limited to his own territory. Thus, when David was compelled by the plots of his enemies to fly for his life from his native land, he complained that he had been driven out to serve other gods. When the Israelitish exiles in Babylon were commanded by their conquerors to sing a song of praise of Jehovah, they refused, saying, "How shall we sing Jehovah's song in a foreign land?" To them Jehovah was the deity of Israel only. When Naaman was persuaded "that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel," he nevertheless requested permission to take "two mules' burden of earth" back to his native land on which he might offer worship to Jehovah, for he still remained a victim of the primitive habit of thought that without the actual earth of Israel no worship of Jehovah was possible.

The Exile redeemed the Jews from a narrow nationalism and lifted their eyes to the larger vision and wider horizon of a divine purpose and power which included in its limitless and loving scope every man of woman born. When they returned to their native soil they brought with them a view of God which

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inspired them with faith in the redemption of the whole race of mankind. They did not abandon their belief that they were the chosen people of God, but now they held it, not just as a special privilege, but as a tremendous and inescapable responsibility. It was no longer merely an opportunity to enjoy Jehovah's exclusive favor, but a high and unavoidable obligation to share the blessings of their faith with all the world. This is the spirit and the sentiment of the hundredth psalm: "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands."

All people that on earth do dwell,  
Sing to the Lord with cheerful voice.

God is the shepherd of humanity, not merely of Israel.

Know that the Lord is God indeed;  
Without our aid he did us make;  
We are his flock, he doth us feed,  
And for his sheep he doth us take.

This conception of the universal shepherdhood of God and the unity of mankind as his children seldom, if ever, found expression in Israel until the utterances of the prophets and psalmists of the Exile. Its manifestation in this psalm strongly indicates the probability of its being of post-exilic origin.

Another ground for attributing the psalm to the

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period of Israel's return from her long and dreary exile is furnished by the exhortation,

Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise.

This allusion to "courts" and "gates" almost imperatively points to the conclusion that the psalm was written after the Temple had been rebuilt.

The psychological reason for this view, to which allusion has been made, is suggested by the truth, abundantly attested by the record of human experience, that the emotion of praise, which this psalm forcefully and beautifully articulates, is the fruit of pain, rather than of peace. Prosperity and security seldom provide the wings of faith that enable the soul to rise to lofty heights of adoring worship. When only soft winds of ease and comfort blow upon the mystic garden of the heart, the fruits and flowers of faith are apt to wither and die. Man's spiritual nature gains its elevation through stern discipline.

Who never ate his bread in sorrow,  
Who never spent the darksome hours  
Weeping, and watching for the morrow,—  
He knows you not, ye heavenly Powers.<sup>2</sup>

It was when the harsh winds of fate had blown dark clouds of bitterness over his life that Milton told the

<sup>2</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister*, II, 13.

world of Paradise Regained. Tennyson wrote the greatest religious poem of the century, *In Memoriam*, because the icy blast of bereavement had threatened to freeze the genial current of his faith. Francis Thompson fortified the hearts of his readers with the gospel of "The Hound of Heaven" when his own heart was fiercely assailed by the frigid winds of poverty and loneliness and ill-health. William Kethe composed his deathless version of the hundredth psalm when storms of persecution were raging in the Scotland of the sixteenth century. The Doxology we sing every Sunday, which breathes the spirit of the hundredth psalm in terms of Christian faith, was written by Thomas Ken in the course of a life marked by personal trouble and public tumult. He was a lad when Charles I was executed. He lived through the turbulent days of Cromwell's government and the Restoration, the reigns of Charles II and James II. He witnessed the bloodshed and civil strife which preceded William III's accession to the throne. He was the victim, also, of personal trial and tribulations. While yet a boy he experienced the tragedy of bereavement in the death of his parents. Later, after he became a bishop,<sup>3</sup> his refusal to violate his conscience

<sup>3</sup> In 1683 Charles II visited Winchester during the erection of his magnificent palace there. He was accompanied by so many friends, including his mistress, Nell Gwyn, that the housing accommodations of the town were overtaxed. The King's demand that Ken surrender

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resulted in his imprisonment in the Tower of London. This was the man, and this his experience of life, and these the circumstances of his time, who wrote the deathless four lines of praise we call "The Doxology."

Isaac Watts's stately rendering of the hundredth psalm, slightly altered by John Wesley, concluding with the glorious lines,

Wide as the world is His command;  
Vast as eternity His love;  
Firm as a rock His truth shall stand,  
When rolling years shall cease to move,

was written when the religious life of England was at a very low ebb and spiritual leaders were in despair.

Christians cannot forget that on the night in which he was betrayed, the night when evil men were tracking him to death, even the death of the cross, Jesus sang a hymn—and we need not doubt that it was a hymn of praise, proclaiming his gratitude and joy and confidence in God.

These illustrations are typical, not exceptional, and they show that the most fervent expressions and ex-

his home as lodgings for Nell Gwyn was met with indignant refusal. "A woman of ill repute," said Ken, "ought not to be endured in the house of a clergyman." More than a year later, when the bishopric fell vacant, Charles declined to consider the applications made on behalf of numerous candidates, declaring, "Who shall have it but the little fellow who would not give poor Nellie a lodging." Thus, by appointment of Charles II, Thomas Ken became a bishop.

hibitions of exultant faith have been born not in days of sunshine, but in days of deepening and seemingly impenetrable shadows of threatening calamity. All of which confirms us in the conviction that the hundredth psalm was written by an unknown singer of Israel who lived in Jerusalem during the harrowing, but heroic, days of the return of the exiles and the rebuilding of the Temple.

The Jews who crossed the desert in the long caravans that carried them from Babylon to resume life in their ancestral homeland were only a pitiful remnant, numerically and financially, of the proud and prosperous race that had flourished there before the cruel oppressor had wasted the land and transported the people. They found Jerusalem an unrecognizable desolation and the Temple, which had been the glory of the city, a heap of ruins. Resolutely and enthusiastically they set to work to reclaim the land, restore their homes and rebuild the Temple. But unexpected difficulties confronted them. Drought and consequent poor crops blighted their hopes. Ruthless and powerful enemies constantly menaced them and made it extremely difficult for them to obtain the materials essential to their task of reconstruction. They were forced, even while erecting their house of worship, to keep weapons of war within easy reach to defend themselves against possible sudden



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attack by watchful and jealous foes. Even when the Temple was completed it was in such pitiful contrast to Solomon's spacious and magnificent edifice that the older people wept. There they were, still living in the shadow of a foreign despotism, afflicted by poverty, menaced and molested by malignant foes, and so overwhelmed with grief and melancholy that Nehemiah, the Governor of Jerusalem, was constrained to counsel them against "mourning and weeping" and to exhort them to manifest the spirit of joy, for, as he said, "The joy of the Lord is your strength." It was when the prevailing mood was one of dejection and sorrow that an unknown prophet, probably an associate of Nehemiah, wrote this summons to jubilant religion, "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord."

In the presence of so much suffering and apprehension it must have sounded to some like mockery, just as to many of the contemporaries of William Kethe and Thomas Ken and Isaac Watts the admonition to exuberant praise must have seemed vain and unreasonable. But to the author of our psalm and his spiritual successors through the ages the exhortation to "make a joyful noise unto the Lord" was natural and, indeed, an inevitable concomitant of their creed. The spirit of religious joy is not just a bubbling emotion or frothy sentiment, dependent upon

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the possession of bounties, and which is apt to disappear when calamity and misfortune invade the life. It is a spirit which goes far deeper than all raging currents and outsoars all human storms because it issues from the knowledge and conviction expressed in our psalm:

Know ye that the Lord he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

To one who holds, or, rather, is upheld by, this faith, the conclusion is imperative and spontaneous and sure:

Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name.

The psalm portrays a triumphant trust we greatly need just now. Night has fallen upon the landscape of contemporary life. Darkness conceals the horizons of high hopes that once beckoned us. We live and move and have our being amidst a blackout of dreams once radiant as sunrise on the sea. Through the enveloping night we can hear the beating of vast wings, the wings of the Angel of Death. Sometimes it seems as though the only light is the lurid glare of bursting bombs and the flames they kindle on the dearest hearthstones of civilization. In the presence

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of such ugly facts, in the midst of a bad, mad, sad world, it is impossible to be joyful unless we share the psalmist's secret of faith. Faith does not insure the absence of calamity, but it enables the loyal soul to triumph in spite of it, because it steadies the soul upon the persuasion that "the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations."

Your house of dreams is shrouded, so you say;  
The door is locked, the windows shuttered fast,  
And you are desolate as day by day  
You watch the weary hours go slowly past.

In spite of all, you will go back again,  
Throw wide the shutters and admire the view,  
And where the ashes of old love have lain,  
Kindle a mighty flame to warm the new.<sup>4</sup>

When the naked creed of brutality is boldly trying to replace the habits of civilized society and has brought millions of people under its merciless might, we can believe in the realization of our noblest dreams, we can praise, laud, and bless the name of the Lord always, only if we share the conquering and comforting faith that the Eternal is our shepherd and his love and power are invincible.

This was the creed of the indomitable and insight-

<sup>4</sup> Augusta Barbara Bailey, in the *Toronto Daily Star*, October 3, 1940. Used by permission.

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ful spirit who first told men to sing to themselves and each other, "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord." Across the ages many voices have blended in this psalm of praise. Let us emulate their trust in the midst of tragedy, their courage in the midst of peril, their gallant gaiety when others yield to the panic of godless melancholy, meeting the question of the gloomy and doubting by echoing the mighty response of their brave and blithe spirits:

For why? the Lord our God is good,  
His mercy is forever sure;  
His truth at all times firmly stood,  
And shall from age to age endure.

## Psalm 108: A Psalm of David

### VICTORY

O God, my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise.

The psalm of which our text is the first verse is a combination of parts of two previous psalms. The first five verses are almost identical with the last five verses of the fifty-seventh psalm, and the last eight verses are the same as the last eight verses of the sixtieth psalm. Such repetition is not unknown in the Psalter. For example, every attentive reader must have observed that the fourteenth psalm, beginning, "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God," is repeated verse by verse, with only trifling variations, in the fifty-third psalm; and that the seventieth psalm is a reiteration of the closing verses of the fortieth. The recurrence of psalms in the Hebrew hymnbook is not surprising when we remember that it is not merely a collection of the great religious poetry of Israel, but a compilation of several collections. As Oesterley remarks, "Obviously, a psalm would not figure twice in the same collection, whereas this is easily comprehensible if several col-

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lections are amalgamated, for a favorite psalm might well have been preserved by more than one collector.”<sup>1</sup>

This accounts not only for the duplication, with minor differences, of passages in the Psalter, but it also explains apparent contradictions within the same psalm. For instance, the fifty-first contains this reflection: “Thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt-offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.” This is the passionate cry of a penitent soul who feels the utter futility of ceremonial sacrifices to “cleanse the stuffed bosom of that perilous stuff which weighs upon the heart.” He dismisses the ritual of altar sacrifices as irrelevant and unavailing in his quest for healing and peace of conscience, and enunciates the Magna Charta of purely spiritual religion, declaring, “Thou desirest not sacrifice. . . . The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit.” But the verses immediately following are a flat contradiction of this sentiment: “. . . build thou the walls of Jerusalem. Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt-offering and whole burnt-offering: then shall they offer bullocks upon thine

<sup>1</sup> W. O. E. Oesterley, *A Fresh Approach to the Psalms*, Chas. Scribner's Sons, 1937, p. 60.

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altar." The simple and satisfying solution of the problem presented by these conflicting views stated in successive verses of the same psalm is that some editor of a collection of David's psalms, centuries after David's death, added the last two verses of the psalm as we now have it in order to bring it into conformity with the altered conception of Temple ritual obtaining in his own day. Thus, the established theory that the Psalter, as it appears in the Bible, is not merely the work of one collector of the sacred literature of Hebrew poets, but the embodiment of the labors of many editors of different centuries who accumulated and revised the immortal literary productions of Jewish spiritual geniuses from the exodus from Egypt to the return after the exile—this now-accepted theory is the key to the otherwise bewildering divergence of thought within the same psalms, and the reiteration of whole passages and, indeed, as we have seen, of entire psalms.

Let us use this key in interpreting the one hundred and eighth psalm. From the fact of its identity with parts of two other psalms we are forced to conclude either that it is the original utterance of the Sweet Singer of Israel, or that the two earlier psalms which it combines are the original ones, parts of which were united by some later scribe to meet the new situation of his day. Alexander McLaren adopts

the latter view, holding that, "The return from Babylon would be an appropriate occasion for thus revivifying ancient words. We have seen in preceding psalms that Israel's past drew the thoughts of the singers of that period, and the conjecture may be hazarded that the recent deliverance suggested to some devout man, whose mind was steeped in the songs of former days, the closeness with which old strains suited new joys." <sup>2</sup> Battenwieser peremptorily dismisses this idea with the somewhat scornful exclamation, "As if there had ever been an age intellectually so poverty-stricken that, when stirred to expression by the exigencies of the time, it could produce nothing more worthy than this!" <sup>3</sup>

It must be conceded, however, that apt quotations from the literary works of distinguished writers of other days are not necessarily proof of intellectual poverty. Even the most accomplished phrase-makers have sometimes found the most fitting expression for their emotions and the best medium for conveying their message in the language of authors long dead. When Mr. Roosevelt sent a message of hope and encouragement to the Prime Minister of Britain by Mr. Willkie last February he borrowed some moving and memorable lines from Longfellow's "The Building of the Ship":

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, III, 273.

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 70.



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. . . . sail on, O Ship of State!  
Sail on, O Union, strong and great!  
Humanity with all its fears,  
With all the hopes of future years,  
Is hanging breathless on thy fate!

The President evidently felt that his deep and passionate yearning for Britain's victorious emergence from her grim and torturing ordeal could be more forcefully and eloquently stated by a quotation than by any words of his own. Similarly, it is not unreasonable to suppose, Battenwieser to the contrary notwithstanding, that a prophet of the Exile might have found in some words of David, written five hundred years before his time, an exact expression of his mood.

It seems to me, however, that there are incontrovertible reasons against the view that the one hundred and eighth psalm is the adoption of passages from David's writings by a later scribe. For one thing, the first five verses, which read,

O God, my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise,  
even with my glory.

Awake, psaltery and harp: I myself will awake early.

I will praise thee, O Lord, among the people: and I  
will sing praises unto thee among the nations.

For thy mercy is great above the heavens: and thy  
truth reacheth unto the clouds.

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Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens: and thy glory above all the earth,

are perfectly harmonious with the rest of the psalm, while their counterpart in the last five verses of the fifty-seventh psalm are much less obviously congruous with the remainder of that psalm. Again, the last eight verses of the one hundred and eighth psalm conform to the thought of the first part, but the same verses as found in the sixtieth psalm are stridently discordant with the first part of it, which portrays despair induced by reverses in war:

O God, thou hast cast us off, thou hast scattered us, thou hast been displeased; O turn thyself to us again.

Thou hast made the earth to tremble; thou hast broken it: heal the breaches thereof; for it shaketh.

Thou hast shewed thy people hard things: thou hast made us to drink the wine of astonishment.

These reflections are followed by an almost frantic prayer for deliverance from a desperate situation. But the closing verses of the sixtieth psalm, which are also the closing verses of the one hundred and eighth psalm, contain no hint of defeat in war. On the contrary, they are an exultant expression of rejoicing over smashing victories and of confidence that God will enable him to conquer the one remaining enemy that threatens the nation. Thus, there is an irreconcilable inconsistency between the two sections of the sixtieth

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psalm. One cannot escape the conviction that if they were written by the same hand they were not written at the same time or under the same historic conditions.

But there is no inconsistency in the one hundred and eighth psalm. The joyous meditation upon the goodness and greatness of God, which forms the first half of it, is a natural prelude to the list of victories recorded in the second half and the serene prediction of further triumph which forms its climax.

Not only is the psalm a unity of thought and mood, but it accords perfectly with the facts of history in Israel immediately after the death of Saul and the beginning of David's reign. Let us recall the situation. The decisive battle on Mount Gilboa, in which Saul and his three sons perished, and in which his army was scattered and shattered, produced chaos in Israel. The cities of the Jordan valley were evacuated. The countryside in the vicinity was deserted. The roads were choked with refugees seeking to escape from the Philistine terror. The nation was in a state of hopeless confusion. It should be remembered that even before the armed forces of Israel were vanquished on Mount Gilboa Saul's government had divided and enfeebled the nation. By his wickedness and weakness he had forfeited the friendship of his wisest counselor, the prophet Samuel. By his insane

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jealousy and treachery he had driven into exile his bravest officer, the gallant David. By his folly he had alienated the best heart and mind of the nation. By his ruinous policies he had lost the loyalty of many of the ablest and most patriotic of the people. National decay and destruction were the logical consequences of Saul's stupidity and misrule. The death of Saul and the complete rout of the army and the oppression of the enemy created widespread suffering and disorder. Disunity prevailed. A son of Saul's, who escaped from the battle, set up a government at Mahanaim. David, supported by his own tribe, established a rival government at Hebron. For several years the nation was torn by bitter civil war between the House of Saul and the House of David, and at the same time was cruelly harassed by the Philistine tyranny. Gradually David's power and influence grew until even the staunchest supporters of the House of Saul recognized that if the nation were to regain its independence the people must unite under David's leadership. After years of struggle and sacrifice David became the acknowledged king of the entire nation.

The Philistines saw, in the cessation of civil strife in Israel and the reunification of its long implacable factions, a serious threat to their continued domination. They acted swiftly to crush what they regarded

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as rebellion against their rule, sending an army of invasion. For a while David and his forces suffered many reverses. He was even compelled to abandon Hebron, his seat of government. Eventually, however, David's military astuteness and the persistent valor of his men were rewarded, and the tide of war turned and flowed in their favor. The invading army of the Philistines was halted and driven back in defeat and disaster. David gained the initiative and took the offensive against the Philistines, expelling them in a series of battles from the territory of Israel, and ultimately crossing their borders, attacking and capturing their capital, and forcing the proud and haughty oppressor to capitulate to him. Flushed with victory, and confident that God had given it to him, David continued his career of conquest, subduing other surrounding foes as well as the Philistines, until there remained only one country, Edom, the ancient enemy of Israel, to threaten his people's peace and security. He faced the approaching war with Edom with high hopes of victory, inspired by his past successes and his glowing faith that God was on his side. The last eight verses of the one hundred and eighth psalm record these triumphs and reflect David's mood of humble and heroic trust in the irresistible power and purpose of God for him and his people.

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God hath spoken in his holiness; I will rejoice, I will divide Shechem, and mete out the valley of Succoth.

Gilead is mine; Manasseh is mine; Ephraim also is the strength of mine head; Judah is my lawgiver.

The proper names in these verses represent cities or tribes which, after the battle of Gilboa, had come under the Philistine yoke, but were now liberated and united by David. The next verse refers to David's conquest of other nations. "Moab," he says, "is my washpot." The exact significance of the metaphor of a washbasin is obscure, but the psalmist's meaning is very plain. Undoubtedly the phrase was intended to indicate somewhat contemptuously the complete and easy subjugation of Moab, and perhaps that Moab had been reduced to humble services like a washbasin.

"Over Edom will I cast out my shoe." The structure of the sentence shows that the conquest of Edom is yet to be achieved. That inveterate enemy seemed impregnable in her mountain fastness; but David, while in no sense minimizing the enormous difficulties that had to be met and mastered in making war against her, was nevertheless sure that ultimately success would crown his efforts. The metaphor of "throwing a shoe" is not altogether out of date as a sign of conquest. It still lingers in its traditional association with weddings. To this day in the Arabian

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villages near Jerusalem the bridegroom addresses his bride with the words:

O beautiful woman, let me live with you;  
I am barefoot and will put on your shoe.<sup>4</sup>

Apparently, even in David's distant day, the throwing of a shoe symbolized dominion.

The concluding clause of the verse, ". . . over Philistia will I triumph," is a confident reference to his future defeat of that haughty and arrogant race. The final verses of the psalm express David's unwavering confidence as he commences his campaigns against Edom and Philistia in complete reliance upon God.

Through God we shall do valiantly: for he it is that shall tread down our enemies.

The vindication of David's faith is a matter of record. It is written in the glories of his reign, which witnessed the emancipation of his nation from servitude following defeat in war, the reunion of the nation which had been broken by external pressure and internal strife into weak and hostile fragments, and the expansion of the national territory and power by conquest, all accompanied by a deepening of faith and encouragement of culture which made possible the spectacular accomplishments of his son and suc-

<sup>4</sup>I am indebted to Battenwieser for this interesting fact.

cessor on Israel's throne. These remarkable achievements caused future generations to look back upon David's time as Israel's golden age. It was in the earlier years of his regime that David wrote this psalm. His first efforts were devoted to the creation of national unity, his next to driving out the invader and achieving security against the menace of hostile neighbors. When his task was almost completed he composed this noble psalm of jubilant praise and invincible trust.

You will observe that the psalm was the fruit of stern struggle and sacrifice endured in the strength of faith. Often he must have been tempted to despair. Frequently he must have been disappointed and disillusioned by the selfishness and sectionalism, cowardice and forgetfulness of God among his contemporaries. In the dark days of crushing military reverses he must have been well-nigh disheartened and hopeless of winning against the superior might and ruthless malignancy of his enemies. But, to his eternal credit, he never surrendered to pessimism or dismay. He kept on fighting his foes and encouraging his followers because he kept on trusting God. Like the Lincolns and Churchills and all the revered and honored benefactors of humanity, he refused to be diverted from his mission by the timid counsel of appeasers or the twittering chatter of defeatists, or to



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be discouraged by the tremendous odds against him; and so, when his enormous labors and sacrifices by the blessing of God issued in freedom and unity and justice and security, he was able to reflect with gratitude and joy upon the past and the present, declaring, "O God, my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise," and to face the future in the certainty of unshaken faith, affirming, "Through God we shall do valiantly."

The lesson of the story of this psalm cannot be missed. It has an apt message and a deep significance for our own situation. Remembering the speeches and writings one has heard and read since the present conflict broke out, one is moved to paraphrase some memorable words of Abraham Lincoln—to say: "When, in the providence of God, the evil designs of totalitarian governments have been thwarted and destroyed, and liberty and peace enthroned on the earth, there will be some statesmen and editors and other molders of public opinion who will be able to remember that with unfaltering trust and unaltering determination they have helped mankind on to this great consummation; while, alas, there will be others who will be unable to forget that with malignant heart and deceitful speech and false, if honest, logic, they strove to hinder it." As we read and reflect

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upon this psalm, born of the memory of brave and triumphant resistance to aggression and disunity, may our words and actions in this critical hour prove our right to greet its author across the ages as a kindred spirit.

## Psalm 119: An Anonymous Psalm

### A EULOGY OF THE DIVINE LAW

This is the longest of the psalms. It is unique in its literary structure and style, characterized by studious and slavish adherence to an artificially conceived pattern.

When we open our King James Version of the Bible and read the psalm we observe that it is divided into twenty-two sections, each consisting of eight verses, and all of them headed by different words, equally obscure to the uninitiated. If we are curious enough to consult a commentary we discover that these words are the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, and that in the original each of the eight verses of each section commences with a word beginning with the letter at the head of the section. Hebrew scholars inform us that, with the solitary exception of the one hundred and twenty-second verse, every one of the one hundred and seventy-six verses contains one of the many Hebrew words for law. Thus it becomes clear that the psalm is an acrostic composition devoted to an appreciation of the law of God.

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Its unknown author apparently set himself the unusual and difficult task of writing a poem in eulogy of the divine law in the fashion of an acrostic, following the order of the Hebrew alphabet. There were to be twenty-two stanzas, that is, as many stanzas as there are letters in the Hebrew language. Each stanza was to consist of eight lines. Each line of each stanza was to commence with the same letter, and the whole poem was to be an expression of the value of God's law in human life. Each of the first eight verses begins with the first letter in the Hebrew alphabet, each of the second eight verses with the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and so on. Apparently the author wished to use the word "law," or one of its synonyms, such as statutes, commandments, testimonies, judgments, in every line of the poem. In this he succeeded, with the exception already noted. The one hundred and twenty-second is the only one which fails to contain one of the several Hebrew words for law.

To compose such a poem requires genius of a special kind. It demands a highly developed gift of artifice, an eccentric ability to elaborate a single idea in manifold combinations of expression. So far as we know, this psalm constitutes the sole literary legacy which its anonymous author bequeathed to posterity, and it reveals a fondness and a flair for the

kind of poetry of which the writings of Alexander Pope are the most familiar example. Such poetry has upon it the smell of the lamp and the imprint of the study. It lacks the freshness and spontaneity of the works of a David or a Robert Burns. In a group of literary men a few years ago, a notable Philadelphia writer pontifically declared, "After all, there has been no great poetry written since the days of Alexander Pope." To which the clever retort was made, "And who, pray, was writing it in his day?" The comment was intended to suggest that the poetry of Pope, and of those who write in his style and spirit, is too mechanical to permit its authors to be assigned the chief place in the hierarchy of distinguished poets. Of course, it is dexterous and, occasionally, as in the case of this psalm, attains heights of brilliance and emotional power.

Although there are few ideas in the one hundred and nineteenth psalm, with its one hundred and seventy-six verses, yet, like the few bits of colored glass in a kaleidoscope, they assume many shapes of beauty. The unceasing repetition of its main idea never becomes tiresomely monotonous. To quote Alexander McLaren: "Its verses are like the ripples on a sunny sea, alike and impressive in their continual march, and yet each catching the light with a differ-

ence, and breaking on the shore in a tone of its own." <sup>1</sup>

It would be a grave and gratuitous error to suppose that the literary eccentricities and idiosyncrasies of our poet, his studious care and elaborate artifice in writing, are evidence of insincerity. Some people seem to think that if a speaker is artistic he is necessarily artificial. They are suspicious of the genuineness of a poet or an orator who takes the trouble to embellish his thought with the ornaments of verbal form; but, as G. K. Chesterton has pointed out, care expended on oratory is evidence of sincerity, not a refutation of it. In discussing the brilliant rhetoric in which eighteenth-century oratory abounded, Chesterton brands as foolish and false the idea that its rhythmic and sparkling utterances are too self-consciously achieved to be ingenuous. He says:

We do not fall into this folly about any of the other arts. We talk of a man picking out notes arranged in ivory on a wooden piano "with much feeling," or of his pouring out his soul by scraping on cat-gut after a training as careful as an acrobat's. But we are still haunted with a prejudice that verbal form and verbal effect must somehow be hypocritical when they are the link between things so living as a man and a mob. We doubt the feeling of the old-fashioned orator, because his periods are so rounded and pointed as to convey his feeling. . . . And as with any other artist, the care

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, III, 291.

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the eighteenth-century man expended on oratory is a proof of his sincerity, not a disproof of it. An enthusiastic eulogium by Burke is as rich and elaborate as a lover's sonnet; but it is because Burke is really enthusiastic, like the lover. An angry sentence by Junius is as carefully compounded as a Renaissance poison; but it is because Junius is really angry—like the poisoner.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, the elaborate care which the author of the one hundred and nineteenth psalm has taken in expressing his emotions and convictions about the word of God may be taken as evidence of deep and genuine feeling. He was so much in earnest that he took endless trouble in the form and phrasing of his profoundest feelings and conclusions about the law of God.

It is plain that he was a devout soul, an earnest and unwearied student of the religious literature of his race. He never tired of studying the word of the Lord given through Moses and the prophets. His supreme passion was found in the writings of the spiritual leaders of Israel, which to him were the utterances of the Most High. "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee," he wrote. "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law," he prayed. "Thy testimonials also are my delight and my counsellors," he declared. "Thy statutes have been my songs in

<sup>2</sup> Gilbert K. Chesterton, *A Short History of England*, Dodd, Mead & Co., 1917, pp. 229, 231. Used by permission.

the house of my pilgrimage," he said. "The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver," he testified. "O how I love thy law! it is my meditation all the day," he exclaimed. "How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth! . . . . Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." From these sentences of the psalm it is evident that we are listening to a man of profoundly religious inclinations. Representative he was of those rare souls of every age who have looked beyond the transitory and the finite and the material to the reality of eternal truth, and who have ever believed that "man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever." The deep things of God and the spiritual truths of life revealed through the prophets and leaders of his people were the fountain-light of all his day, the master-light of all his seeing.

But the psalm not only makes clear the peculiar literary genius and ardent piety of its author, it also portrays him as a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. It is obvious from the psalm that he had been the victim of cruel distress. In anguish of soul he prayed: "Remove from me reproach and contempt. . . . . My soul melteth for heaviness. . . . . The proud have had me greatly in derision. . . . . When wilt thou execute judgment upon them that



persecute me? . . . . They had almost consumed me upon earth. . . . . The wicked have waited for me to destroy me." He had suffered the agony of oppression inflicted by wicked and powerful men. From the depths of his despair he cried to God for deliverance. The pain he endured incident to man's inhumanity was not attended by any accusing consciousness of moral vileness. Indeed, apart from the concluding verse, where he says, "I have gone astray like a lost sheep," the psalm does not contain any direct confession of sin. The cry just quoted is not the bitter penitence of a prodigal, but the general admission of a good man, who, as the best have ever been, was keenly sensible of his own unworthiness. In the midst of well-nigh insupportable afflictions, which sprang not from personal wickedness, but from the wanton persecution of evil men, this noble and gifted and deeply religious man prayed to God for help. But the heavens seemed deaf and God indifferent. Like many sufferers today forced to endure relentless and unjust wrath of tyrants, or crushed by the desperate plight of dear ones, or desolate because of some personal sorrow, this suffering saint called to the God of his fathers, "When wilt thou comfort me?" The exact cause of his grief is not disclosed, but its reality is tragically manifest in the words wrung from him by his torturing experience.

But the sublime and glorious fact about this great unknown is that he never parted from his faith in God. Even though his passionate pleading for emancipation from his servitude to suffering was unanswered by any relief from his trials, yet did he trust and obey God. His consciousness of fidelity to the law of God in the face of persecution and hardship is expressed repeatedly, as for instance: "The proud have had me greatly in derision: yet have I not declined from thy law. . . . The bands of the wicked have robbed me: but I have not forgotten thy law. . . . I am become like a wine-skin in the smoke; yet do I not forget thy statutes. . . . They had almost consumed me upon earth; but I forsook not thy precepts. . . . The wicked have laid a snare for me: yet I erred not from thy precepts. . . . Princes have persecuted me without a cause: but my heart standeth in awe of thy word." Perhaps the verse which most picturesquely and vividly describes the steadfastness of his faith in the face of tragedy is the third in the group of sentences I have just quoted: "I am become like a wine-skin in the smoke." This striking metaphor was no doubt suggested to him by the familiar spectacle of a wine-skin hanging in the fireplace, and in its withered and wrinkled appearance he discerned a likeness to his own soul. Troubles had encompassed him like thick clouds of smoke

eddy among the rafters where wine-skins hang and get blackened and contorted. Yet, in spite of his miseries and deprivations and struggles, he had clung loyally to his religious faith and training, and could declare, "Yet do I not forget thy statutes." No doubt the psalmist's contemporaries used to hang skins of wine in the warmth of the chimney for the same reason that manufacturers of such vintages today place their products in varying degrees of temperature, namely, to bring the wine more quickly to maturity and excellence. Similarly, his faithfulness to the law of God had ripened and refined his character.

Thus the personality of the nameless author of this psalm grows distinct and commanding. He was a man of rather eccentric literary genius, of unquestioned piety and purity of life, one who knew from bitter experience the torment of heartache and grief, who had prayed in vain to be delivered from persecution and pain, and whose crowning quality was unwavering faith in God. One rises from reading the psalm and contemplating the personality of its author with the sense of having been in the presence of a sincerely religious soul. The thought of his rare literary accomplishment in writing the psalm is lost in admiration for the man himself. "The aim and end of all the religions," said Goethe, "is to help men to meet the inevitable." When James of Harvard

was asked what religion does for one he replied that, "among other things, it gives a splendor to what must be borne in any case." The heroic devotion of this anonymous writer to the religious instruction of his childhood and youth ought to excite our homage and stimulate our desire and determination to emulate it. There are too many who fit into George Eliot's description of Hetty in *Adam Bede*: "Hetty was one of those numerous people who have had godfathers and godmothers, learned their catechism, been confirmed, and gone to church every Sunday, and yet, for any practical result of strength in life, or trust in death, have never appropriated a single Christian idea or Christian feeling." The acid test of one's religious faith is not the contents of the creed to which one subscribes, but his vindication of and support by it when he is called upon to endure the sore discipline of things.

The most convincing proof of the value and power of religion in human life is the inspiring spectacle of men and women triumphantly enduring the tribulations of time. It was this which won Tertullian to Christ in the second century. "I became a Christian," he said, "because these people were far braver in their lives and in their deaths than anybody else, and I wanted to learn and share the secret of their courage." This, too, was the secret of Tolstoy's con-

version in the nineteenth century. The greatest Russian of his generation declared that he became a Christian because he noticed that "they met life, and its rigors and surprises, with a peace and joy no one else shares."

In the last analysis, in times of depression and distress we are helped most by the noble examples of men and women whose characters and careers attest the genuineness of their religious faith and compel our admiration and confidence. A plain-spoken Scot once wrote: "I am a Christian because of the Reverend Dr. Marcus Dods; talk about 'evidences of Christianity,' Dods is it." There is no argument so convincing as a life. The supreme argument for unfaltering trust in the guidance and guardianship of God is a man who, like the psalmist, keeps his faith, or, rather, is kept by it, even though conditions seem to contradict it.

The most effective contribution which we can make to the religious morale of our fellows is the contagion of our own manifest and conquering faith. This is why the cross is the supreme symbol of Christianity. Had Jesus been only the dreamer of Nazareth, the preacher of the Mount of Beatitudes; had he died comfortably in his bed and never known tragedy and suffering and death on Calvary, nor triumphed over it, he would not have been the Re-

deemer of the world. To be a person the record of whose life is aflame with legible sincerity and personal devotion and unfaltering faith, to be known and read of all men, is to mean something of the relief and comfort and inspiration which Christ gave the world.

All honor to the heroes and heroines who, in places of obscurity and oppressed by sore trial and grievous affliction, with the smoke and flame of calamity and grief darkening their spirits and choking their voices, yet, sustained and animated by a faith that triumphs over wrong, are able to perform life's duties with purposefulness and hope and cheer. They shine as stars amid the darkness of the times, and light the way for their fellow travelers. The unknown writer of the Letter to the Hebrews knew the value of such examples, and presented to his readers a wondrous procession of the great dead whose story was the glory of the past and the inspiration of the present. But after writing of them in that majestic chapter, which Jowett called the Westminster Abbey of the Bible, he exhorted those to whom he wrote to imitate their spirit and achievements.

The secret of the psalmist's brave endurance of handicaps and hardships, sorrows and afflictions, was his faith in God, a faith which transmuted his trials into materials for the development of courage and patience and love. The very obstacles to his happi-

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ness and fortune were changed into opportunities and obligations of service and trust. Even of Jesus we read that he was made "perfect through sufferings"; and the servant is not greater than his Lord.

To all who profess the Christian faith, but especially to the stricken and suffering adherents of it, who may be truly likened to a wine-skin hanging in the smoke of the chimney fire, blackened and withered and wrinkled by flame and smoke, is accorded the high and hard and heroic privilege of demonstrating the reality of their religion, and of proving a benediction to their fellows, and of mellowing and perfecting their characters as followers of Christ. Only they can inspire and strengthen others with the kind of noble virtues and religious trust produced in themselves in spite of, nay, because of, the blinding smoke and stifling heat of painful but purifying adversity, who remember and obey the will of God for them as revealed in his word spoken by the prophets and made flesh in Jesus Christ.

From creed and scheme the light goes out,  
The saintly fact survives,  
The blessed Saviour who can doubt,  
Revealed in human lives.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> John Greenleaf Whittier.

















# *Personalities Behind the Psalms*

ROBERT B. WHYTE

Here are expository sermons on twelve psalms. Each contains rich devotional stimulus and scholarly guidance in largely unexplored areas of scriptural inquiry.

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